A GLIMPSE INTO THE HINDU RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY AND EXPLOITS OF SHRI RAMA

G.N. MUJOO

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APPEAL

This book is only FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION, amongst my friends and relations to whom it is presented. It is not priced for sale. The cost of publishing 200 copies has been borne by me.

I humbly request you to donate a minimum of Rupees :- (and preferably much more) per book which is almost double its actual cost. The donation thus collected will be given in full to one or more religious trusts/ashrams or charitable homes for children, aged and infirm, blind, lepers, etc. for which the advice of each donator shall be kept in view.

(G.N. MUJOO)

AUTHOR

Sh. G. N. MUJOO - born in **January 1931**, of Kashmiri Brahmin Pandit family at Rainawari in Srinagar. He obtained B.Sc. degree from Kashmir University in 1949 and Bachelor of Electrical Engineering Degree in 1954 from Calcutta University. He was appointed as Assistant Electrical Engineer in the Electrical Department of Jammu and Kashmir Government in 1954. He was promoted to the posts of Executive Engineer, Superintending Engineer and Chief Engineer in June 1961, May 1971 and May 1978 respectively. He superannuated from the State Service in January 1986. Thereafter, he was invited by Tata Consulting Engineers to work as Chief Engineer in their Delhi Office till January 1991. Then Sh. Mujoo devoted himself to studying books of his choice towards the fulfillment of his long standing desire. That produced this compendium of rich thought and information.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this book to my wife Smt. Chooni Mujoo who encouraged me to devote a considerable time to sift through the available literature while silently performing her household duties.

My sincere gratitude and thanks to all those who guided and helped me directly or indirectly in bringing out this Volume.

(G.N. MUJOO)

FOREWORD

People think philosophy to be an indispensable guide for spiritual life but it has as much or as little to do with the inner life as any other subject of the Humanities. Philosophy is mainly a province of the mind whereas the life of the spirit immediately concerns the inmost being or, according to the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, the whole being of man with the soul as its centre. A clear understanding of this position is necessary for a useful study of "The Hindu Religion and Philosophy" which is only a compilation of the ancient, medieval and modern thought, attempted to thread together as labour of love by Shri G. N. Mujoo. This is only a glimpse of the vast spiritual thought `Adhyatma Darshan', which the efficient compiler has tried to make himself understand and also wants to share with his friends and relatives. A laudable attempt, indeed.

It is natural that one feels dull, unwanted and out of place when there is nothing to do, especially after one has retired from active service. But the wise men continue to apply themselves to activity either by feeding a hobby of whatever type it may be or by advancing towards the fulfillment of an aspiration. Sh. Mujoo appears to be one of those few.

After Sh. Mujoo retired from the superior service of J&K State and later of the assignment given by Tatas in Delhi, he sat square to read books which he had aspired for. With his religious bent of mind, fineness in thinking

and flair for writing he applied himself to the study of Hindu Religion and Philosophy, simply to acquaint himself with the universally accepted Vedas, the Puranas, the Epics and the spiritual luminaries of modern India. The notes preserved by him during the past five years piled up. This made him produce the compendium of his learing in this book.

I would suggest to the noble author to add a chapter on (a) the Bhagwad Gita, which is called an Upnishad because it contains the essence of Self-knowledge and (b) the Yoga Vasishtha, which is one of the great wonders that India has produced in its literature.

I trust the book will be quite useful for the general reader. It will especially give right information to the youth of this great country, India.

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INTRODUCTION

PART - I : "A GLIMPSE INTO THE HINDU RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY"

This part of the book is a glimpse at Hindu Religion and Philosophy. It covers briefly, the Vedas, Upnishads, Puranas, Hindu Mythology, Indian Philosophy, Hinduism, etc. The contents of this book are a compilation of brief sentences and passages which were noted down unwittingly while studying various books on Hindu Religion during the last over four years of my retired life. As these notes piled, it was thought prudent to present these in the form of a book to my friends and relatives through private circulation so that they have a quick look at Hindu Religion & Philosophy. For those who know very little on the subject, this book may be beneficial. However, for the learned ones, it may bring many happy recollections. The book is expected to find a lot of interest amongst our ladies and youngsters.

The reader is requested to offer his/her comments on this book to enable the author to develop on his maiden presentation of thought and culture which relate to human behaviour and general well being.

DETAILS OF CONTENTS

Chapter I : "Vedic Gods"

Gods of the Upper World, Air and the Earth are named with brief explanation, besides the Inferior Deities, Demons and Ancestral Spirits.

Chapter II : "Vedas & Vedantic Thought"

A brief description of the Vedas, number of 'mantras' (hymns) in each, the seers of various 'mandalas' (books) of Rig Veda and some references regarding the period when Vedas were formulated appear in this chapter. Some hymns have also been included.

Chapter III : "Upnishads"

The number of Upnishads, how these were translated in other languages, leading to their publicity worldwide, has been briefly touched upon. Some interesting passages from the Principal Upnishads have also been given.

Chapter IV : "Puranas"

The chapter gives a short description of the eighteen Puranas with the number of verses in each aggregating to four lakh, all in Sanskrit, the language of Gods. Sh. J. N. Kaul 'Kamal' helped me with his notes in the compilation of this chapter.

Chapter V : "Indian Mythology"

A note on mythology and a description of Indian Mythology from 'Samudra Manthan' (Ocean Churning) by Gods and 'Asuras' (Demons) has been given in this chapter.

Chapter VI : "Some Anecdotes from Puranas"

A few mythological tales and the crux of Hindu Mythology and Culture has been touched upon.

Chapter VII : "Hinduism"

An interesting historical account of the last 5000 years of Hinduism has been given in this chapter. The Vedic, Sutra, Epic, Puranic, Darsana and Medieval Periods have been identified. These are followed by Devotional Movement of the 15th and 16th Century and the Modern Period. Authority of the present period is also depicted.

Chapter VIII : "Nilmata Purana"

Nilmata Purana is supplementary to Rajatarangini. Whereas the former deals with social aspects and gives an account of men, their life, homes, streets, gardens, temples, food, amusement and prevalent religious thought including rites, ceremonies etc., the latter dwells on the political aspects and describes Kings and Queens of the State of Kashmir.

Chapter IX : "Indian Philosophy"

A brief insight of Indian Philosophy has been presented in this chapter.

Chapter X : "The Arya Samaj"

It illustrates briefly the life and works of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, his formation of Arya Samaj - its popularity and the ten point philosophy preached and propagated by him.

Chapter XI : "Brahmo Samaj Movement"

It contains a brief information regarding Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of the movement, leading to the establishment of Brahmo Samaj and his successors.

Chapter XII : "Religions of Ancient World"

Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian, Sanskritic Indian, Greek, Roman, Iranian, Phoenicians and Etruscan religions are religions of Ancient World. In this chapter a little bit of Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian, early Sanskritic Indian and Greek religions has been brought forth.

Chapter XIII : "Experiences of first Vision"

I came across the record of the experiences of first vision of God by Swami Ram Krishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Chaitanya Krishna, Francis Younghusband and Swami Yogananda. These are reproduced in this chapter.

Chapter XIV : "Useful Sayings and Instructive Events in Indian Life"

This chapter contains a variety of information, thought provoking quotations and legendary fables which were felt to be worth incorporation. The source of each item is given at its end.

PART - II : "THE EXPLOITS OF SHRI RAMA"

This part of the book covers the story of Shri Rama and embraces most of the events of His Life and Exploits as contained in Tulsi Ramayana. Those who have not been able to read Ramayana for one reason or the other may find it not only useful but beneficial as well.

May Lord Rama remove our ignorance, anger, ego, greed, lust and hypocrisy and make us wise enough to lead a life of righteousness!

(G.N. MUJOO)

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CHAPTER - I

"VEDIC GODS"

"Om tat sad iti nirdesho,
Brahamanas tri vidhah smrtah;
Brahamanas tena Vedascha,
Yajnascha vihitah pura."

..... (Gita, XVII-23)

(Om Tat Sat - this has been declared the threefold appellation of the Absolute, who is Truth, Consciousness and Bliss solidified. By that were the Brahamanas and the Vedas as well as Sacrifices created at the Cosmic Dawn.)

Vedic Gods can be classified into the following categories :

- Gods of the Upper World
- Gods of Air
- Gods of the Earth
- Abstract Deities
- Inferior Deities
- Demons and Animals
- Ancestral Spirits (Pitris)

A) GODS OF THE UPPER WORLD

1. DYAUS :

It is the same as Zeus in Greek and refers to Sky and Earth. In the Rig Veda Dyaus is regarded as father of all with Earth (Prithvi) as his consort. It seems to have been revered by Aryans long before they came to India. In the later Vedantic period Dyaus was on the wane and was replaced by other names.

2. VARUNA :

It refers to the Sky i.e. Heavens which makes all objects in the Cosmos do their assigned jobs. It is the God of earliest Aryans. He watches good and evil action being done by all humans. Forgiveness of sins is sought from Varuna.

"O, Varuna, whatever
the offense may be,
That we as men commit
against the Heavens;
When through our want,
we violate the laws,
Chastise us not O' God
for that inequity."

Mitra is often worshipped with Varuna in the Vedic hymns.

3. MITRA :

It refers to the power of the Sun. Mitra with his unwinking eye beholds all creatures. One who is protected by Mitra is neither slain nor conquered.

4. SURYA :

It refers to the Sun God driven on a chariot by seven mares. He is the preserver and soul of all things stationary and moving.

5. SAVITRI :

According to Sayana, Sun is called Savitri before its rising and Sun from its rising to setting. It is a golden deity with golden eyes, hands, tongue, armour, and is yellow haired. He ascends in a golden chariot. He is the lord of desirable things and bestows prosperity on its worshippers. Gayatri Mantra is addressed to Savitri by every devout Brahmin.

6. USHA :

It refers to the Goddess of Dawn. It is considered as daughter of the sky and vanishes the moment the Sun's rays lay hold on her. She became the object of worship for the Aryans who would start their prayers before day break.

7. <u>ASHVINS</u> :

These refer to the twin Gods of Morning and Evening. They are young, beautiful and swift. Their chariot is driven by golden winged horses. They are physicians of Gods.

8. <u>VISHNU</u> :

In the Rig Veda, it is referred to as a Deity of the fourth rank though in later period He is one of the Trimurti comprising (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva). It is the God who pervades and preserves. Many incarnations are attributed to Him.

9. <u>PUSHAN</u> :

It refers to the God that guides travellers in their journeys and nourishes cattle (Pashu).

10. <u>ARYAMAN</u> :

He is considered as God of light, golden, sleepless and many eyed. He is invoked along with Varuna and Mitra.

B) GODS OF AIR

1. <u>VAYU</u> :

It refers to the God of Wind. It is also called Vata.

2. INDRA :

It refers to the God of Thunder & Rain. Indra became the principal God of Vedic Aryans, though he was not worshipped before Aryans entered India. In later period, he is referred to as the God of 'Swarga' (Heaven). He is considered strong, agile and handsome. He rides a golden car with a golden whip and two swift steeds driving it. His weapon is the thunderbolt.

3. PARJANYA :

It refers to the God of Rain Clouds. He is considered the Lord of all moving creatures and soul of all things.

4. MARUTS :

These refer to the God of Cyclones. In later period, they are referred to as Sons of Indra and have often accompanied him as allies in his exploits.

5. RUDRA

He is the God of Storms and father of Maruts. With the advance of Vedic period Rudra became the universal destroyer, the Shiva or Maheshwara, one of the Triad (Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara).

C) GODS OF THE EARTH

1. AGNI :

It refers to the God of Fire. Aryans worshipped him every morning and evening.

2. SOMA :

It refers to the God of Intoxicating Drink of Aryans obtained as juice from Soma Plant. Soma mantras would be recited while the Soma plants were crushed and juice extracted.

3. PRITHVI :

It refers to the Goddess of Earth and is regarded as the mother of all beings and adored as such. She is generally invoked along with the Sun.

4. YAMA AND YAMI :

They are said to be the son and daughter of Vivasvat, the Sun and Saranyu, the dawn. In the Athar Veda, Death (Mrityu) is said to be Yama's messenger.

D) ABSTRACT DEITIES

1. PRAJAPATI :

Prajapati is the creator, the Lord of creatures who bestows progeny.

2. VACH :

It refers to the God of Speech. In later literature it has been referred to as Goddess Saraswati, the Goddess of Wisdom and Eloquence.

3. BRIHASPATI :

It refers to the God of Prayer. In later period it is identified as Regent of Planet Jupiter.

4. KA :

In later literature it is referred to as Prajapati and in Mahabharata it is referred to as Daksha.

5. KAMA :

It refers to as the God of Desire of doing good things in general.

6. VISHWA DEVAS :

These refer to all other Gods that have been omitted in the above list.

7. ADITI & ADITYAS :

Aditi is the mother of Adityas who are mentioned more often in the Vedas. While Aditi is the heaven, the midair, the mother, the father, and all gods, Adityas are the Gods of external celestial light.

8. GODDESSES

Agni's wif e is Agnayi, Indra's is Indrani, Varuna's is Varunani. Likewise each God has a spouse. Shraddha is the Goddess of religious faith, Saraswati is Brahma's spouse, Lakshmi is Vishnu's spouse and Sati is Shiva's spouse. Durga, Kali, Shakti and other goddesses have been referred to in Vedas.

E) INFERIOR DEITIES

1. TVASTRI :

It refers to a skillful workman who makes and sharpens God's Armaments.

2. RIBHUS :

It refers to a skillful workman who makes Indra's chariot, the car of Ashvins and the cow of Brihaspati.

3. VISHWAKARMA :

It refers to the God of workmen and manual labour. He has fashioned the abodes of Gods.

4. DIVINE PRIESTS :

These refer to 'Rishis' and 'Munis'.

5. GHANDARVAS & APSARAS

Apsaras are celestial courtesans and Ghandarvas are attendants on Gods.

F) DEMONS

1. ASURAS :

These refer to living spirits and 'Rakshasas' which are hostile both to Gods as well as men. They have horrible shapes and are dreadful.

2. SERPENTS :

These refer to Nagas etc. which have been hostile to Gods and men.

G) PITRIS

These refer to fathers and forefathers who have left for the heavenly abode. Early Aryans would worship the departed ancestors in one form or the other and this has continued. In the 'Shrada' rites, the departed ancestors are offered 'Pindas' - the rice balls with milk, curd and flowers.

CHAPTER - II

"VEDAS AND VEDANTIC THOUGHT"

"Traigunyavishaya Veda,
Nistraigunyo bhavarjuna;
Nirdvandvo nityasattvastho,
Niryogakshema atmavan."

..... (Gita, II-45)

(Arjuna! the Vedas, thus, deal with the evolutes of the three 'gunas' (modes of Prakrati) viz. worldly enjoyments and the means of attaining such enjoyments; be thou indifferent to these enjoyments and their means; rising above pairs of opposites like pleasures and pain etc., establish in the Eternal Existence (God), absolutely unconcerned about the supply of wants and the preservation of what has been already attained and self controlled.)

Vedas,the books of knowledge, are sacred to Hindus for the last over 3500 years, though some claim that these are more ancient. The Vedic 'mantras' (hymns) have passed under oral transmission from generation to generation in the start. The 'mantras' have come from ancient Rishis and Seers who were spiritually one with God.

One 'kalpa' is 42940.8 lakh years and consists of fourteen 'manvantars' each of 3067.20 lakh years.

Each 'manvantar' is equivalent to 71 'mahayugas'. A 'mahayuga' or 'chaturyuga' comprises four 'yugas' (ages) namely 'satyayuga', 'tretayuga', 'dvaparyuga' and 'kaliyuga' (golden age, silver age, bronze age and iron age). These 'yugas' last for 17.28, 12.96, 8.64 and 4.32 lakh years (total 43.2 lakh years) respectively. The descending duration of these 'yugas' marks corresponding deterioration in the physical and moral standards of the people. The deterioration being slow over the years cannot be detected easily and in early years. The radiance, valour and patience which crowned the previous ages appears to be fading away.

A brilliant Sage named Vyasa (who is believed to be an incarnation of Vishnu) compiled the Vedas for the benefit of people. He classified them as Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Athar Veda so that people could grasp these well. This gave him the name Veda Vyasa. He was born of Satyavati, the daughter of Nishadaraja from Muni Parashara. He was a man of extra ordinary intelligence. Being dark in complexion (Krishna) and born on an island (dwipa), he was also called Krishna Dwaipayana. His grandfather was Sakti and great grandfather was Vasishtha. Obeisance be to Vyasa.

The four Vedas, Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Athar comprise a total of about 20,000 'mantras'. The four Vedic texts are called "Samhitas". Rig Veda comprises of ten 'mandalas' (books) having 10,552 stanzas; Yajur Veda has forty chapters containing 1975 stanzas; Sama Veda has 1875 stanzas and Athar Veda has twenty books with 5987 stanzas. Rig Veda is the foundation of the other three Vedas. Yajur Veda has its 30% contents, Athar

Veda has its 16% contents and Sama Veda has all its contents except 104 stanzas from Rig Veda. Excluding repetition, the total number of Vedic Stanzas is about 16,000.

The six mandalas (II to VII) of Rig Veda are attributed to the following Rishis and their families .

- Mandala II : Grtsmada
- Mandala III : Vishwamitra
- Mandala IV : Gautama
- Mandala V : Atri
- Mandala VI : Bhardwaja
- MandalaVII : Vasishtha

Unlike the above, Mandala VIII is not attributed to a regular family. Kanvas, to whom this mandala is attributed, were more of a tribe than a compact family. Some of the Seers of this mandala are Ayu, Bharga, Brahamatiti, Kusika etc.

Mandala IX is different from the other mandalas in as much as it is addressed to a single deity i.e. Pavamana Soma. Other mandalas are addressed to various Gods and Deities. Various Seers to whom this mandala is attributed are Namadha, Priyamedha, Ucathya, Madhucehanas, Medhathithi, etc.

Mandala I and X are also attributed to various Rishis viz. Madhucehanas, Medhathithi, Sunahsepa, Kanva, Savya, etc.

There are different versions of the age of Vedas. Max Mueller, a famous German Scholar on Vedas, suggests that Vedas came to us in 1200 B.C. According to H. Jacobi, author/scholar who made some calculations

on the basis of some astronomical considerations, the Vedas came in 4000 B.C.

P.C. Gupta a noted scholar, believes that Vedas pertain to the period 3928 B.C. He has based it on a reference of eclipse in Rig Veda which occurred on 26.7.3928 B.C. M. Winternitz, in his book on "History of Indian Literature" has given the age of Vedas as 2000 to 2500 B.C. The theories on Mohenjodaro and Harrapa clay tablets bearing inscriptions of Hittite and Milani Kings, Mitra, Varuna and Nasatya suggest that the Vedic period be reckoned as 2500 to 600 B.C. Bal Gangadhar Tilak believes that Vedic hymns are as old as 4500 B.C. Vedas came as revelations in the minds of Seers, Rishis and Sages and they taught these to their students and disciples orally who taught these further to their disciples and students and the process went on till Veda Vyasa compiled them.

Vedic Sages have, through their ritualistic prayer, tried to ennoble everybody. They have spread the message of Humanism and love for all Aryans and suggest that if love does not enable one to get over an enemy then the only alternative left to get over him is to fight with him valiantly. Brahmin is in pursuit of knowledge particularly spiritual knowledge. In the Athar Veda, the following call is given for a Brahmin :

"Step beyond what is human,
Take up the divine word;
And establish thy leadership,
Along with friends thou hast."

The above prayer is used by an 'Acharya' (Spiritual Teacher) for initiation of a Brahmin boy in the 'Upanayana' (Initiation Ceremony) when he invests the religious student with 'yagneopavit' (the holy thread) after imparting knowledge of the Vedas and gives him the authority to go out and teach Vedas to others.

According to the Yajur Veda, the following verses induce one to 'satya' (truth in the ultimate sense).

"By self-dedication,
one obtains consecration;
By consecration,
one obtains grace;
By grace,
one obtains reverence;
By reverence,
one obtains Truth."

Vedic code provides for health, strength, education, household life and cooperative living. It believes that a society without a Brahmin would be as bad as one without a Vaishya or a Shudra. Cooperation had to be functional. Vedas made it clear that these are meant for one and all irrespective of their functions. It is only later (in the Puranic times) that Shudras do not seem to have been permitted to learn Vedas.

In the Vedas women Seers are mentioned. This seems to imply that for women there was on bar to read or recite Vedas when women themselve would compose its verses.

The prayers in Vedas are mostly petitions not only for spiritual blessings but for wealth and welfare that must have been felt most desirable by men for their settling. Prayers include those for help, preservation, welfare, rain, health, sons, forgiveness, future life, etc. There are prayers addressed for adulation of Gods and Deities who are described and praised for their deeds, valour, beauty and knowledge. Some hymns (in part) are given at the end of this chapter.

The Vedas are repositories of instructions regarding every form of conduct i.e. spiritual, moral and ephemeral, etc.

Vedantism identifies the Absolute Being with Consciousness which is awareness. Being is a self-luminous substance and is impersonal. Being or Existence is the ultimate reality. Shruti says, "One who thinks Brahaman is not existent himself becomes non-existent. One who is asleep does not know that he is sleeping and one who has no sleep does not dream." The ultimate existence is transcendental and does not enter into the condition of empirical thinking. Vedantism cannot be identified with any form of Agnosticism for it is positive and definite in its affirmation about the nature of ultimate substance. Shruti says, "What is great and limitless is bliss." There is no bliss in littleness and limitation. The more the bliss grows within us, the more we feel the pulse of infinite existence. Deeper the vibration, wider the knowledge, loftier the feeling till vibration is lost in sublimity itself.

When one has sufficient practice in meditation, one begins to feel the immanence and all pervasiveness of existence, the entire existence impresses with a sense of fullness. This is full, that is full, from full the full originates. If the full is taken from full, the full remains. Shruti says, "Who does not know the Knower of all things. One who knows it not, knows; one who thinks he knows, does not know."

"From Bliss,
all these becomings are born;
By Bliss,
they exist and grow;
To Bliss,
they return;
For who could live,
or breathe;
If there was'nt,
this delight of existence,
As the ether,
in which we dwell."

.....(Taittireeya Upnishad)

By the truth of Being, we understand some things that can never cease to be, and that which exist in itself and for ever in one mode of living. Midway between pure being (Sat) and imaginary existence (Asat) there lies an intermediary existence called Appearance. It is an illusory show of existence. It is not real. It is false. An idea or appearance is false when it is supposed to be really existent, but on closer examination, ti is seen to possess a form by which it passes for what it is not.

'Leela' means a playful or sportive activity which can never reveal the thing in its true colour before us but always draws a picture for which we cannot assert any particular reason and which is merely an appearance suitable to the capacity and understanding and fulfilling the purpose of one to whom it appears but has no serious meaning to one who sportily assumes that appearance.

Truth is being. Being is absolute and relative. Relative is an appearance, the appearance is the 'Leela' of a Brahaman through Maya. Maya may be regarded as the principle of individualization, a force, a power revealing the world forms and modes.

Chhandyoga Upnishad says, "Oh modest one, these created beings have their root habitation and support in the Real."

Sureshwaracharya writes that the world has come out of 'Sat', abides in 'Sat' and loses itself in 'Sat'. So the entire world is real but viewed apart from 'Sat' it is 'Asat' (False).

The 'Apara-prakriti' lies at the root of five subtle elements. It originates through the Ether, the Air, the Fire, the Water and the Earth at the command of Ishwara.

'Prana' is the inmost of being and exists behind all senses. It is cosmic energy and supports creation. It originates from Atman. It is the energy which directly controls the process of inhaling and exhaling. In Prashna Upnishad, "Prana is situated in the eyes, ears, mouth and nose." Prana is supposed to be situated in the heart.

'Chakras' (Lotuses) are the nerve centres in the cerebrospinal axis. They are objects of yogic perception. The lowest is 'Muladhara' located in the pelvic. It is the seat of semi intellectual sentiments. It is followed by the 'Swadhisthan' the Hypogastric Centre. It is the seat of origin of selfish sentiments. Next is the 'Manipur' i.e. Epigastric Centre which is marked by selfish propensities. Next is 'Anhata' corresponding to Cardiac, the seat of domestic feeling. Next is the 'Vishudh' corresponding to Carotid-plexus, the seat of perceptivity. Next is the 'Ajna' corresponding to Medulla Oblongeta. Last is the 'Sahasrara' corresponding to cerebrum. Last two centres are the seats of higher mental functions and spirituality. These six centres are connected by 'Susmana', the nerve which is active in Yogis alone. Its main function is to carry energy through the coiled up serpent, the 'Kundalini' from 'Muladhara' to 'Sahasrara'.

Vedanta is a form of noble enthusiasm to feel all pervasiveness of peace, so that we may get peace in life and peace in death and finally passing into peace itself, the 'Nirvanic' calm of existence.

The Rig Veda says,

"Peace be unto Heaven,
Peace be unto Upper Ether;
Peace be unto the Earth,
Peace be unto Water.
Peace be unto Herbs,
Peace be unto Large Trees;
Peace be unto Gods of Universe,
Peace be unto Brahaman.
Peace be unto all,
Peace be unto Peace itself."

SOME HYMNS FROM THE VEDAS

"A No Bhadra Ritvo Yantu Vishwata"
(Let noble thoughts come to us from every side.)
..... (R I 89.1)

Prayer to Indra -
"Go forward, ye heroes and Conquer."
..... (R X 103.13)

"May we conquer when we war."
..... (R IX 61.24)

"As rats eat weaver's thread,
cares are eating inside me;
Thy singer O' God Almighty,
show thy mercy on us once;
O' Gracious Lord!
be like a father to us now."
..... (R X 33.3)

"Bounteous one! Thou art our father;
and our mother,O' Lord,
thou hast been;
now we pray for Thy bliss
..... (R VIII 98-11)

"He who is One, wonderful,
mighty and strong by holy laws."

..... (R III 1.27)

"Here this One God, the Lord of men,
looks forth exceeding far and wide;
And we, for your welfare,
observe His holy laws."

..... (R VIII 25.16)

Prayer to Indra for Strength, Valour and Conquering Power :

"May our bodies be stone!
Thou art Wrath, give us wrath;
Thou art Conquering Power,
give us Conquering Power."

..... (Y VS 19.9)

Prayer to Indra as friend -

"Never may this friendship be severed,
of Thee O' Deity and of the sage Vimada;
We know O' God Thy brother like love,
with us be Thy auspicious friendship."

..... (R X 23.7)

Prayer to Indra for Wisdom -

"God! give us wisdom,
as a father gives wisdom to his sons;
Guide us, much invoked, in this path;
May we live and have light!"

..... (R VII 32.26)

Prayer to Surya -

"Looking at the transcendent light
beyond the darkness
we have come to Surya;
God among gods,
the Light that is
the most excellent."

..... (R I 50.10)

Prayer to Savita -

"Most gracious God
who brings (the world) to life
and keeps (it) in repose;
He who controls both what moves
and what is still;
May He, Savita, the God grant us grace!
for serene life
with threefold bar against evil.

..... (R 453.6)

Prayer to Savitri for mental power -

"We contemplate
that adorable glory of the Deity,
that is in the Earth, the Sky
and the Heaven;
May He stimulate our mental Power!"

..... (R III S & Y 62.10)

Prayer to Ushas -

"Obedient to the reins of Eternal order,
give us each thought
that is more and more blissful;
Shine on us today,
Dawn easy to be invoked,
In us and the rulers
may thy bounty lie!"

..... (R I 123.13)

Prayer to Earth -

"Earth my mother,
see me securely with bliss;
in full accord with Heaven, wise one,
uphold me in grace and splendour."

..... (A XII 1)

Prayer to Varuna for Intelligence -

"O' Varuna, sharpen the intelligence,
wisdom and insight of him
who is striving for enlightenment."

..... (R III 42.3)

God Varuna all pervading -

"God is that in which things converge,
He is that from which things diverge;
He is of our own land,
He is of foreign land;
He is divine,
He is human."

..... (A IV 16.8)

Varuna -

"He who is
the Supporter of the world of life,
Who knows the secret,
mysterious names of the morning beams;
He, the poet, cherishes
manifold forms by His poetic power,
even as heaven."

..... (R VIII 41.5)

"Varuna has spread the Vista in forest,
Put vigour in horses, milk in kine;
Set wise instincts in hearts,
fire in the waters,
the Sun in heaven
and Soma on the mountains."

..... (R V 85.2)

Agni -

"A steady Light,
swifter than thought,
is stationed among moving things
to show the way;

All the Shining Ones
being of one mind and like wisdom,
proceed reverently
towards the one Intelligence."

..... (R VI 9.5)

Prayer to Agni for Brightness -

"O' Agni, make us shine brightly
like fire produced by friction."

..... (R III 48.6)

Vishnu -

He made three steps - Vishnu
the Protector, the Undeceivable,
Upholding, thenceforth,
the eternal statutes."

..... (R I 22.18)

"May the Devas bless us,
from where Vishnu strode through,
the seven regions of Earth."

..... (R I 22.16)

Rudra -

"We worship Tryambaka (Rudra),
who spreads fragrance
and increases nourishment.
May He release me,
like the cucumber from its stem,
from death but not from immortality!"

..... (R VII 59.12)

Shiva and Shankara -

"Homage to Him who is the Source of bliss,
and of well being;
To the beneficial one (Shankara),
the Bestower of happiness;
To the good (Shiva),
the surpassingly good."

..... (Y 16.41)

Saraswati -

"Saraswati - the mighty Ocean (of lights),
illumines with Her light.
She brightens all intellects."

..... (R I 3.12)

Brahmanaspati, Lord of Prayer -

"Having chased away
the wicked ones and darkness,
Thou mountest Thy refulgent car of Order;
the awful car, O' Lord of Wisdom,
that subdues the enemy,
Slays the wicked,
cleaves the stalls of light,
and finds the light."

..... (R II 23.3)

Prayer to Pushan -

"He who sees all from above and aside,
sees all living things together.
May He, Pushan, be our Saviour!"

..... (R III 62.9)

Prayer for body feelings to uplift and ennoble -

"Give sight to our eyes,
Give sight to our bodies that they may see;
May we survey and discern this world!
May we look on Thee Surya,
the most lovely to behold;
- See well with the eyes of men!"

..... (R X 1584.5)

Prayer for longevity and strong body -

"And, we will hear for a hundred years,
and speak for a hundred years;
And we will hold our heads high
for a hundred years,
Yea, even more than a hundred years."

..... (Y VS 36.24)

Prayer for sweetness of Home -

"Sweet be my going forth from home,
and sweet be my return to it."

..... (R X 24.6)

Prayer for unity of family -

"I shall make you of united heart,
of one mind, free from hate;
Be attached to one another,
like the newly born calf to the cow.

Let the son follow the father
in his noble endeavour,
and be of one mind with the mother.

Let the wife speak,
sweet, peaceful words to the husband;
Let not brother hate brother,
sister hate sister.

Be all united and of one high purpose,
and speak words with courtesy;
May your drink be common,
your food be together!"

..... (Athar V. III-30)

Prayer for three day ceremony of Upanayan -

"The teacher initiating the pupil,
makes him a (spiritual) child within him;
Him for three nights he bears (like mother),
in his (spiritual) womb;
When he is born,
the shining ones convene to see him."

..... (A XI 5.3)

Prayer from bridegroom for his wife -

"May All Devas and the Apas
unite our hearts!
May Matarishwa, Dhata, Deshtri
all bind us close!"

..... (R X 85.47)

Prayer from wife for her husband -

"May my husband be long lived!
May he live a hundred years!"

..... (A XIV 2.63)

Prayer from others for couple -

"Join this couple O' Indra,
like the Chakravaka and his mate."

..... (A XIV 2.64)

Prayer for lifelong union -

"May you two dwell here,
be not parted;
enjoy the full span of life,
playing with sons and grandsons,
rejoicing in your own home."

..... (R X 85.42)

Prayer for freedom from fear -

"May I be fearless of a friend,
fearless of the foe;
fearless of the known,
fearless of the unknown!
May our nights be without fear,
our days without fear!
May all the directions be my friend!"

..... (R 19.15.6)

Prayer for knowledge of Supreme -

"The Eternal of the (Vedic) hymn,
existing on the Supreme region
in which all Shining Ones have their being.

What will he do with the (Vedic) hymn
who does not know that?
But those who have known that,
they are perfect."

..... (R I 164.39)

One in Many -

"One is Agni, kindled in many a spot;
One is Surya shining over all;
One is Ushas illuminating all this,
That which is One has become this All."

..... (R VIII 58.2)

Atman the Supreme Spirit -

"Desireless, firm, immortal, self existent,
contented with the essence,
lacking nothing is He.
One fears not death who has known Him,
the soul (Atman) serene, ageless, youthful."

..... (A X 8.44)

The final mystery unanswered -

"Who verily knows
and who can here declare it,
Whence was it born
and whence came this creation?
And did the Shining Ones
appear with its production?
But then who knows
whence it has arisen."

..... (R X 129.6)

The final mystery answered -

"Who knows this truly
and who will now declare it,
what paths lead together to Gods?

Only the lowest aspects
of the existence of those are seen,
who exist on Supreme, mystical planes."

..... (R III 54.5)

Remarriage of widow -

"Go up O' woman! to the world of life;
Come, you are lying by one
who is lifeless,
You have entered into relationship
of wife to husband,
of him who takes hand and woos you."

..... (R X 18.89)

Remarriage of woman -

"The woman who having a former husband,
thereafter getting another later on;
She and her (new) husband - these two,
if they give five rice dishes and a goat,
will not be separated."

..... (A IX 5.27)

Prayer for Universal friendship -

"May all beings look on me
with the eye of a friend!
May I look on all beings
with the eye of a friend!
May we look on one another
with the eye of a friend!"

..... (Y 26.2)

IGNORE NOT THE VEDAS

"The Vedas
    constitute the earliest documents
of human thought
    and yet
some of the ideas and concepts
    enshrined in them
have not been excelled
    by any later thought,
Eastern or Western,
    in elegance, subtlety and
power to inspire mankind.

..... 1

The Vedas are
    the very foundation of Sanatana Dharma
and the perennial philosophy of India
    derived from 'Vit' to know.
They are the books of knowledge
    and compendia of wisdom,
referred to as 'Shruti' - the heard
    and discovered by Rishis of Yore.

The truth they proclaim
    were not fabricated
but spontaneous revelations.

..... 2

Impersonal, the Vedas
    were revealed to Seer poets.
not composed
    not subject to limitations
that human thinking is heir to.

They are
revelations of Reality
flowing out in natural course;
the song of the Sages
like a joyous stream
gurgling out of the mountains;
an audio visual aid,
to know the Self.

Vyasa divided the Vedas
a traditional classification
into four Vehicles
Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Athara.

Rig Veda,
the Veda of hymns;
Yajur Veda,
the Rig hymns
and formulae;
arranged for
performance of sacrifices.

Sama Veda,
the Soma Sacrifices
mostly from Rig Veda.

Arranged in
liturgical order is,
Atharvedic religion
and philosophy.

Each Veda in itself
falls into four sections;

Mantra, the poetic expression
of revealed truth;

Brahamanas, the guidebook
of sacrificial rites;

Aranyakas, the forest books,
    the philosophic interpretations
of rituals
    and modes of meditation;

Upnishads or Vedanta,
    the final concluding portions
preaching knowledge of Self.

..... 5

Vedas are the 'Anta'
    the summit of thought
acme of human life
    the Himalayan heights
spreading brilliance of wisdom
    explicit in religio-philosophic truth.
They are implicit in 'Mantra'
    elevating the chant of Hymns.

They preserve authority
    on what they teach
the earnest aspiring Soul.

..... 6

But ignore not the Vedas
    in your enthusiasm for Vedantic truth;
Forego not the Capital
    for the sake of Interest.
Drink deep, therefore
    at the eternal fountain;
Chant thou aloud
    the luring 'Veda Mantra'
freely in open nature;
    And seek thou peace
to visit the earth again."

..... 7

..... (Pt. Janki Nath Kaul "Kamal)

CHAPTER - III

"UPNISHADS"

"Na jayate mriyate va kadachin,
Nayam bhutva bhavita va na bhuyah;
Ajo nityah shashvato ayam purano,
Na hanyate hanyamane sharire."

..... (Gita, II-20)

(The soul is never born nor dies nor does it becomes existent after being born. For it is unborn, eternal, everlasting and ancient. Even though the body is slain the soul is not.)

According to F. Max Mueller, the Vedic literature became known beyond the frontiers of India through Persian translation of Upnishads which was started by Dara Shakoh, the eldest son of Emperor Shah Jahan, who openly professed the liberal religious tenets of Akbar the Great. It seems that he first heard of the Upnishads during his stay in Kashmir in 1640 A.D. Some Pundits from Benaras helped him translate the Sanskrit text of the Upnishads into Persian. He completed the translation of about fifty Upnishads by 1657 and three years later he was put to death by Aurangzeb. He wrote a book, "The meeting of two Seas", in which he brought together the tenets of Islamic Sofis and spiritual doctrines of Hindus.

Anquetil Duperron as per Max Mueller, rendered the Latin translation of these Persian scripts of Dara Shakoh (some say that it was Shopenhaur). He has written that in the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the 'Oupnekhat' (Upnishad). It has been a solace for his life and according to him shall be solace after his death. Through him did the Upnishads penetrate into Europe.

Max Mueller's love for Sanskrit was kindled by the Upnishads. In 1844 while attending Shellings lectures in Berlin, his attention was drawn to these ancient philosophic treatises. After leaving Berlin, he continued study of Sanskrit in Paris under Burnoff. He felt that before reading Upnishads, he must read the Vedas and for doing that he wanted to be thorough with Sanskrit. Even Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the famous Indian Reformer of ancient religion, translated many Upnishads in Hindi, Bengali and English and published them at his own expense before he died in England in 1833 A.D.

While Dara Shakoh translated fifty Upnishads in part by himself, their number as given by Maha Vakya Ratnavali and in Mukhtika Upnishad is 108. Prof. Weber thinks that their number would be 235. However, Max Mueller published the first alphabetical list of 149 Upnishads in 1865 A.D. Later Dr. Burnall and Prof. Hang added 5 and 16 more respectively making a total of 170. The four Vedas have 1180 'Shakhas' (Rig-21, Yajur-109, Sam-1000 and Athar-50) and that each of the 'Shakhas' has one Upnishad. Of these 1180 Upnishads only 108 seem to have survived. Hanuman once requested Sri Rama to advice him as to which of the Upnishads should he study.

Sri Rama advised him to read the twelve mantras of Mandookya Upnishad. These mantras are on 'OM' and are the crux of spirituality. He further told him that if he can't understand these, then he should read the ten principal Upnishads. If he can't understand these, then he should read 28 Upnishads and if he does not understand these then 32. Failing to understand these 32, he should read all the 120 Upnishads.

The roots of the word Upnishads have been derived as 'upa' meaning near, 'ni' meaning down and 'sad' meaning to sit. Therefore, it would mean to sit down near a teacher for instruction. And what are the instructions that a teacher would impart? These would be cream of Vedic thought, which is the aim of all systems of Indian philosophy.

The below mentioned ten Upnishads are considered as the Principal Upnishads :

- Isa Upnishad
- Kena Upnishad
- Katha Upnishad
- Prashna Upnishad
- Mundaka Upnishad
- Mandookya Upnishad
- Taittireeya Upnishad
- Aitareya Upnishad
- Chhandyoga Upnishad
- Brihadaranyaka Upnishad

Adi Shankaracharya has written a beautiful commentary on these Upnishads.

Besides, the following three are also considered to be amongst the earlier Upnishads though

these were compiled much later than those mentioned above :

- Svetasvatra Upnishad
- Kaustaki Upnishad
- Maitrayani Upnishad

The earlier Upnishads are believed to have been composed approximately 600 to 480 B.C. though Max Mueller believes that these pertain to the Mantra Period which has been provisionally fixed as 1000 to 800 B.C.

The last portion of Aranyaka Upnishad was discovered by Dr. Buhler in Kashmir and has been described by him in his report in 1877.

The fundamental doctrine of the Upnishads has been summed up by S.C. Chakravarty as :

The self in man is Brahaman; nothing but Brahaman exists because everything exists in Brahaman and Brahaman is, therefore, the ultimate reality. The world is real, it cannot be unreal because it is emanated from Brahaman. The object of Upnishads is to impart the right knowledge by means of which Atman would be found identical with Brahaman. Lastly Brahaman is full of bliss, feelings not being counterbrand for Brahaman. The doctrine of Atman philosophy is at variance with the Buddhist thought. Upnishads form the concluding portion of the Vedas. Their aim is to bring peace and freedom to the human spirit. Upnishads teach the philosophy of love and devotion. They hint at the truth of life and the suggestions of truth and guesses of God with so many forms that one could seek anything that one likes from them.

The thinkers and writers of Upnishads did'nt give their names. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan points out the following who stand apart from the mythical ones : Mahidasa, Aitareya, Raikva, Shandilya, Satyakama, Jabala, Jaivali, Uddalaka, Shvetketu, Bhardwaja, Gargyana, Pratardana, Balaki, Naruna, Ajatshatru, Yajnavalkya, Gargi and Maitreye.

According to the Upnishads, heart (spiritual) of a man is the dwelling place of God. Brahaman is Atman and Atman is Brahaman. Life on earth means self-perfection. The religion of Vedas is joyous and there is no pessimism in Upnishads.

Upnishads sometimes assert that thought gives us imperfect and partial pictures of reality and at other times it is organically incapable of searching reality. It deals with relation and cannot grasp relationless absolute. No knowledge is entirely false though none is entirely true. It is when thought becomes perfected through intuition that we catch the vision of the real.

"How many Gods are there really, O Yajnavalkya?" "One", he said. "Now answer a further question. Agni, Vayu, Adhitya, Kaala, Prana, Brahma, Rudra, Vishnu. Thus, do some meditate on one and some on another. Say, which of these is the best for us?" And, he said to them, "These are but the chief manifestations of the highest, the immortal and the incorporeal Brahaman."

A great saying in Upnishads, " Aham etat na (I not this)" has been translated by Babu Bhagwan Dass thus :

'Aham' or self is Self-conscious Ishwara. 'Etat' is nature or not self. The relation between the two is signified by 'Na' i.e. negation. The self is not the not self. The syllable 'A', in 'Aum' represents self, 'U' the not self and 'M' is the negation of the two but all these three rolled into 'Aum' represent the 'Prana' (Life).

The whole world is in the process of finite striving to become Infinite and this tension is found in the individual self. God is not a man in such an obvious fashion that he can possess Him absentmindedly and without effort or struggle. God is present as a potential or a possibility. It is man's duty to lay hold of Him by force or by action. If he does not do it, he fails in his duty as man.

To get rid of sin and ego, he must escape from selfishness and put down vain conceits. The love of finite has only an instrumental value while the love of the eternal has intrinsic worth. The foundation of all kinds of love is self love. Adoption of right form of conduct viz. meditation, charity, right dealing, non injury to life and truthfulness are presented in the Upnishads.

The highest religion of the Upnishads which insists on meditation, morality and worship of God in spirit and in truth is not encumbered by such traditional dogmas and miracles as still hang upon the skirts of some other religions. Its central principle that there is one supreme reality that manifests itself in the Universe is not asserted as a dogma. The Upnishads consider the highest form of religion to be spiritual meditation on the Absoluts.

The psychologists have located the soul in the region of heart (not the muscular heart but the spiritual heart which is the centre of concentration). Concentration is fixing of thought on one thing, effacing all other and making mind steady on this thing for sometime. It is difficult generally to have concentration but only through practice one becomes perfect. Upnishads and Vedas did not demand priestly hierarchy. As Brahmins became influential and powerful, they brought conflicting theories and introduced dogmatic and ritualistic beliefs and concepts in religion leading to suppression of inferior castes and multiplicity of thought which finally resulted in the advent of Buddhism.

Some interesting passages from various Upnishads are given below :

ISA UPNISHAD

- That is perfect, this is perfect. Perfect comes from perfect. Take perfect from perfect, the remainder is perfect.
- May peace and peace be everywhere.
- Whatever lives is full of Lord. Claim nothing, enjoy, do not covet others property.
- Hope for a hundred years of life doing your duty. No other way can prevent deeds from clinging, proud as you are of your human life.

- Of certainty, the man, who can see all creatures in himself and himself in all creatures, knows no sorrow.

- How can a wise man, knowing unity of life and seeing all creatures in himself, be deluded or sorrowful.

- Holy light! illuminate the way that we may gather the good we planted. Aren't our deeds known to you? Do not let us grow crooked, we that kneel and pray again and again.

- Moral life is God centred life, a life of passionate love and enthusiasm for humanity, of seeking the infinite through finite and not a mere selfish adventure for small ends.

KENA UPNISHAD

- If you think you know much, you know little. If you think you know it from the study of your mind or nature, study again.

- The man, who claims that he knows, knows nothing but he, who claims nothing, knows.

- When Gods knew that they would fight the demons out, they became boastful. To remove their vanity, 'Atman' (Spirit) came and neither God of Fire nor God of Wind could identify who it was. Only light could. He knew the mysterious person of the Spirit. Light stands above Fire and Wind. Therefore, let mind meditate on Spirit. Spirit is the Good in all and should be worshipped as the Good.

- The conversation between Nacchiketas and God of Death appears in this Upnishad. Nacchiketas asked for three gifts from God of Death :

1. "I may be reconciled to my father. He may be happy on me and keep no grudge against me. I should be welcome to him again."

2. "Show me the fire that leads to Heaven because there no one is afraid of old age and death and one is beyond hunger, thirst and sorrow."

3. "Some say that man dies and continues to exist, while others say that he does not exist. Please explain that to me."

God of Death answered the questions as under:

1. "Be it as you wish" was the reply to the first question.

2. In response to the second question, God of Death said, "Count the beads and worship the triple fire viz. knowledge, meditation and practice; the triple process viz. evidence, influence and experience; the triple duty viz. study, concentration and renunciation. Understand that everything comes from the Spirit. Attain everything that comes from it. Attain everlasting peace and mount beyond birth and death."

3. For the third question, God of Death dodged the reply at first but later, on persuasion, He said, "Aum lies beyond right and wrong, beyond cause and effect,

beyond past and future. That word is eternal self. Killing of body does not kill self. The impure, self willed, unsteady man misses the goal and is born again and again. Above the senses are the objects of desire, mind is above that. Above mind is intellect, and nature's unmanifested seed, God is above intellect. God is the goal and beyond Him nothing exists."

- Not by learning is 'Atman' obtained. Not by genius and much knowledge of books. It is obtained by mystics in their moments of illumination. In the mystic experience the soul finds itself in the presence of the highest.

"God put it into my head and I can't put it into yours", is the last word of mystic experience, simply because it is incommunicable.

- The ideal of ethics is self realization. Moral conduct is self realized conduct. Moral life is one of understanding and reason and not of mere sense and instinct. Know the Self or 'Atman' as the Lord who sits in a chariot called body, 'Budhi' or Intelligence is the charioteer, Mind is the reins, Senses are the horses, and objects are the roads. The self, senses and mind combined, the intelligent called Enjoyer. But he, who has no understanding and is weak in mind, his senses run riot like the viscous horses of the charioteer. He who has understanding and is strong minded, his senses are well controlled like good horses of the charioteer. He who is without understanding, who is thoughtless and impure, never

reaches the immortal, immaterial state, but enters into a round of births. But he, who has understanding and who is thoughtful and pure reaches the state from which there is no return.

PRASHNA UPNISHAD

- Year is the Creator. There are two paths Southern and Northern. Those content with giving alms and performing rituals go to ancestors by the Southern path to attain lunar world and are born again. Those who seek self through austerity, countenance, faith and knowledge go by the Northern path to attain solar world and become immortal.

- Month is the Creator. It has the bright half and dark half. Wise men perform rituals in the bright half and the unwise in the dark half.

- A round of Day and Night is the Creator. Day is life and Night is matter. Man wastes his life if he couples with his wife in day time and preserves it if he does it during night.

- Self sees, touches, hears, smells, tastes, thinks, discriminates and acts. The personal self and ultimate imperishable impersonal self are one.

- He who meditates on the three symbols "AUM" as upon God is joined to the light of Sun.

- God and his sixteen phases are in this body. He created life; from life knowledge; from knowledge air, wind, light, water, earth, sense, mind, food, vigour,

austerity, revelation, karma, world, names. These sixteen phases lose their names when they mingle in God.

MUNDAKA UPNISHAD

- Sounaka said to Angiras, "There is nothing in this world that is not God. He is action, purity, everlasting Spirit. He who has found Spirit is Spirit. Nobody ignorant of Spirit is born into his family. He goes beyond sorrow, sin, death, with the knots of his heart unloosened.

- The Rig Veda says, "Tell this to those who know the Vedas, do their duty, obey the law and make themselves an oblation to the sole Fire. This is that ancient truth sage Angiras declared. Obey the law and understand."

- It is Prana. It is Speech. It is Mind. It is everything in the Universe. God is present in the vile dust and the small mote.

  The Self cannot be gained by the knowledge of Vedas or by understanding it or by much learning alone.

MANDOOKYA UPNISHAD

- Personal self is the impersonal spirit. It has four conditions :

- First is the material conditions, common to all perceptions turned outwards. The seven agents are Heaven (Head), Sun (Eyes), Air (Breath), Fire (Heat), Water (Belly), Earth (Feet), and Space (Body).

The 19 agencies are five organs of sense viz. hearing, touching, seeing, tasting and smelling; five organs of action viz. speaking, handling, walking, generating and excreting; five living fires viz. Praana, Apana, Wyana, Udana, and Sumana meaning (mouth nose, downward stream, heart, climbing up through arteries, middle of the body), discursive mind (manas), discriminative mind (budhi), mind material (chitta) and personality (ahankara).

Second is mental condition i.e. perception turned inwards.

Third is intellectual condition.

Fourth is condition of self.

- The formula "AUM" is verily the Parambrahama.

TAITTIREEYA UPNISHAD

- What is this world? Earth below, Heaven above. Air between and Wind joining them.
- What are Heavenly Bodies? Fire, Sun, Water and Lightning.
- What is Education? Teacher, pupil, knowledge and discourse.
- What is generation? Mother, father, child and procreation.
- What is language? Lower jaw, upper jaw, words and tongue.

- Give with faith, if you lack faith give nothing. Give in proportion to your means. Give with courtesy. Give as the God-fearing give. Give to the deserving.

- 'AUM' is generally employed to represent the nature of Brahaman and brings out its complete character. It is the symbol of Supreme Spirit, the emblem of the highest. 'AUM' is the symbol of correctness and completeness. It stands for three principal qualities of Supreme Spirit personified as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. In the later literature, 'A' stands for Brahma, the Creator; 'U' stands for Vishnu, the Preserver and 'M' stands for Shiva, the Destroyer.

- Brahaman means growth and is suggestive of life, motion and progress and not death, stillness and stagnation. The ultimate reality is described as 'Sat-chit-ananda' meaning Truth, Consciousness and Bliss. Knowledge, power and action are its nature.

- The five elements of fire, water, earth, ether, and air are distinguished. From the Self (Brahaman) sprang forth Ether (Akasha); from Ether, Air; from Air, Fire; from Fire, Water; from Water, Earth; from Earth, Herbs; from Herbs, Food; from Food, Seed and from Seed, Man. Thus, man consists of the essence of food.

AITAREYA UPNISHAD

- God created one sole Self first, then territories of water, light, Earth, then the rulers of territories.

- He created an Egg, then nose, eyes, ears, skin, hair, heart, mind, moon, naval, apana, sex. From sex came seed, then food and then other things and finally He Himself sat inside as Self.

- Whatever there is belonging to the son belongs to the father and whatever there is belonging to the father belongs to the son.

- The four-fold classification of Jivas :

  1. Those born of uterus, like men and animals.
  2. Those born of egg like crows, ducks, etc.
  3. Those born of moisture like worms, insects, etc.
  4. Those born of earth like plants.

<u>CHHANDYOGA UPNISHAD</u>

- There are three classes of creatures, the egg born, the womb born and the soil born.

- Once Narada went to Sanat Kumara and told him that he had read the Vedas, the scriptures, the grammar etc. but has not been able to see Self. Sanat Kumara told him, "All your knowledge is the knowledge of names. Four Vedas, grammar, ritual, etc. are but in name. Worship name as Spirit. He who worships name as Spirit, moves within the limits of what is named as it may please Him, provided he worships it as nothing but Spirit." "Is there anything above name?", asked Narada. Sanat Kumara replied thus :

  "Mind is above speech, mind is Self, is world, is Spirit. Will is above mind, man thinks only

when he wills. Mind's mother substance is above will, when that is stirred, man wills, thinks, calls speech, etc. Meditation is above mind's mother substance, greatness of great comes only through meditation. Wisdom is above meditation, through wisdom we understand Vedas, history, tradition, etc. Power is above wisdom, we become masters of Earth through power and associate with wise and serve. Food is above power, food sustains life. Water is above food, water increases food growth. Light is above water, light gets water though rain etc. Air is above light, everything lives in air like Sun, Moon, etc. Memory is above Air, we remember and understand. Hope is above memory, fired with hope man repeats the sacred word, desires and does things. Life is above hope, life gives life, life gives power. A thinking man knows while an unthinking man cannot know. Therefore think. With faith man thinks, faithless he cannot think. Therefore, have faith. From devotion man gets facts, without devotion, he has none. Therefore, have devotion. When man acts, he gets devotion, without action he has none. Therefore, act. Man acts when he gets happiness, without happiness he does nothing. Find Happiness. Man gets happiness from the unlimited, from limited he gets none. Find the unlimited.

When a man finds a thing, sees nothing else, hears nothing else, knows nothing else, that is the unlimited. The unlimited is immortal. Unlimited depends on His own greatness.

- The Creator gave the knowledge of Self to Prajapati. He passed on the knowledge to Manu who gave it

to mankind. He who studies Vedas rightly under a right teacher, does as taught by the teacher, returns home and settles himself as a householder in a sacred place, keeps his study of Vedas, leads a holy life, turns his senses towards Self. Eventually he attains the kingdom of Heavens.

- The 'Atman' pervades things as salt pervades water when dissolved in it. From 'Atman', things spring as sparks fly out from fire, as threads from spider or as sound from flute.
- The finite is in the infinite. The 'Atman' is in the entire Universe.

BRIHADARANYAKA UPNISHAD

- Lead me from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality.
- A lonely man thinks of wife, children, wealth and work and so long as he does not get these, he thinks he is incomplete. But he is complete only if his mind is himself, speech his wife, life his off-spring, eyes his human wealth, ears his divine wealth, body his work. This is the five-fold sacrifice. He who knows this, gets everything.
- Yajnavalkya explained to Maitreye about immortality thus:

  Wife does not love husband for himself but for herself, husband does not love wife for herself but for himself, father does not love sons for themselves

but for himself, man does not love wealth for itself but for himself, man does not love priests or rulers or community or Gods or creatures or anything for themselves but for himself.

This Self deserves to be seen, heard, thought of, meditated upon. When Self is seen everything is seen.

- More important divine powers, which number 33, are as follows:

Eight Vasus viz. Fire, Earth, Wind, Sky, Sun, Moon, Stars and Heaven.

Eleven Rudras viz. five Living Fires, five Senses and Personal Self.

Twelve months of the year.

Indra is the thunder and Prajapati is the sacrifice.

- A personal God Prajapati tired of solitude, draws forth from himself everything that exists and produces the world, after having divided himself into two, one half male and the other half female.

"Whence we are born
    where do we live
and whither do we go?

O! You, who know Brahaman,
    tell us at whose command
we abide here
    whether in pain or in pleasure?"

CHAPTER - IV

"PURANAS"

"Karmanye vaddhikaraste,
Ma phaleshu kadachana;
Ma karma phala hetur bhur,
Ma te sangostva karmani."

..... (Gita, II-47)

(Your right is to work only, but never to the fruit thereof. Be not instrumental in making your actions bear fruit nor let your attachment be to inaction.)

"Niyatam kuru karma tvam,
Karma jyayo hyakarmanah;
Sharira yatrapi cha te,
Na prasiddhyed karmanah."

..... (Gita, III-8)

(Therefore, do perform your allotted duty for action is superior to inaction. Desisting from action, you cannot even maintain your body.)

Veda Vyasa foresaw that 'Veda mantras' have a characteristic that their esoteric meaning could not be well understood by future generations. He therefore, explained the abstruse truths in the Puranas in a simple, illustrative and catching language so that a common man could understand the Reality. Puranas are invariably in the form of a dialogue. Veda Vyasa taught Puranas to his son Suka, Lomahar shana (also called Romaharshana) and the other sages.

There are eighteen major Puranas and some minor Puranas (called Upapuranas). Among the major ones ten pertain to Shiva, four to Brahma, and two each to Devi and Vishnu. The eighteen Puranas are Brahma, Padma, Vishnu, Vayu, Bhagvata, Narada, Markandeya, Agni, Bhavishya, Brahmavaivarta, Linga, Varaha, Skanda, Vamana, Kurma, Matsya, Garuda and Brahmananda. These contain a total of about four lakh 'shlokas'. The Upapurana as listed in Devi Bhagvata are Sanat Kumara, Narasimha, Naradiya, Shiva, Durvasa, Kapila, Manava, Ausanasa, Varuna, Kalika, Samba Nandi, Saura, Prasara, Aditya, Maheshwara, Bhagvata and Vasishtha.

A short summary of each Purana is given below:

1. BRAHMA PURANA

This Purana has 245 chapters comprising 14,000 'shlokas' (some mention the number to be 10,000). It deals with general topics of knowledge and discusses in particular the twenty sixth principle of Sankhya Philosophy after the Sankhya Yoga is explained in detail. It believes that dharma is the greatest aim of life for this alone accompanies a person in the heavenly journey. All the belongings animate or inanimate are perishable. It says that Brahman, that became Brahma - the Creator, created the Universe. It derives its name from Brahman - the Original Creator. This Purana is also called the 'Adi' or the first Purana. It also gives an account of various 'manvantras' to the time of Krishna.

2. PADMA PURANA

This Purana has 50,000 'shlokas' (some mention the number to be 55,000) i.e. half of Mahabharta but thrice the Bhagvata. It proclaims the oneness of Shiva and Vishnu. Since Brahma was born through the lotus that arose from the naval of Vishnu, it is named Padma Purana. It contains hymns to the Lord. It gives an account of Creation, Earth, the spheres above Earth, the highest being Vaikuntha, the abode of Vishnu and the spheres below Earth like the region of snake Gods, etc.

3. VISHNU PURANA

This Purana has 23,000 'shlokas' and after Bhagvata, it occupies the second place in the Vaishnava doctrine. It has a high literary merit. Lord Krishna, in this Purana, describes his oneness with Mahadeva. Brahma performed 'tapas' for the new manifestation on the lotus emanating from the naval of Vishnu. Therefore, it is termed Vishnu Purana.

4. VAYU PURANA

This Purana has 112 chapters and 11,000 'shlokas' (some mention the number as 24,000). It is termed Vayu Purana as it describes the 'Shesha Shayya' (the Serpent Palanquin) of Vishnu. This Purana is also called Shiva Purana (some say Vayu Purana is more ancient than Shiva Purana which is termed as Upapurana of tantric lore). Vayu purana contains a description of "Jambu Dwipa" and a reference of Bana Bhata's Kadambani.

5. BHAGVATA PURANA

This Purana has 18,000 'shlokas' and is classified in twelve books. The chief deity in this Purana is Narayana Vishnu. All Vaishnava traditions have produced commentaries on this Purana according to the understanding of their own systems of thought. This Purana is considered to be the fruit of the Vedic tree (Nigamakalpatru phalam). Bhakti Shastra (Knowledge of Devotion) and Brahma Sutra are contained in this Purana. "It is the erudite who stands the test in Bhagvata" is an accepted fact (Vidya Vatam Bhagvata Pariksha).

The very first 'shloka' of Bagvata begins with "Janmadhyasya yatah" which is the second sutra of the great work of Vyasa commented upon by Adi Shankracharya. This 'shloka' explains the important words contained in the "Gayatri Mantra". Vallabhacharya terms the work as "Samadhi Bhasha" of Veda Vyasa. Of the commentaries written in Sanskrit the one by Shridhara Swami has become popular under the name "Shridhari".

The main theme of this Purana is Advaita-God with form or without form. Jiva (soul) and the universe - all is Brahman. "God is attainable through intense devotion", is the creed of this book. It has many stories of Yogis, Jnanis and Bhaktas with appropriate prayers, sadhanas and systems. It divulges the secret of the milky Ocean (Kshira Sagar) in which Bhagvan Shesha lives and hence, it is called Shrimad Bhagvata.

6. NARADA PURANA

This Purana has 25,000 shlokas and is in two parts, the first comprising 125 chapters and the second 82 chapters. In the first part there is a description of 'Varna and Ashrama', 'Shradha' (Sequel performances) and 'Prayaschit' (Repentance) etc. There are chapters on 'Vyakaran' (Grammar), 'Nirupta' (Analytical derivation), 'Chhandha' (Prosody), 'Jyotish' (Astrology) etc., 'mantras' of Vishnu, Rama, Hanuman, Krishna, Kali, Mahesha. Devotion to Vishnu is pleaded to be the means of emancipation. In the second part, the life story of Rukmangada is given. It also gives a detailed list of all the Puranas.

Narada, the earnest devotee of Bhagwan Vishnu who sings sweet songs to the deity, has his collection of songs contained in this Purana. Therefore, it is named Narada Purana.

Note :

In the six Puranas mentioned above the expansion of creation is discussed according to their evolutional system. Now regarding the 'Srishti Chakra' (the evolutional circle) the question arises as to who makes it go. The answer is that it is "Shakti" - the personified will of the Supreme Spirit in the Creation.

7. MARKANDEYA PURANA

This Purana has 9,000 shlokas in 137 chapters. The theme of this Purana is that 'Shakti' or 'Prakriti' is the basic impeller of the 'Srishti Chakra'. Its contents comprise life after death, the story of an ancient queen Brahmavadini Madalsa who gave knowledge of Brahman to his son in his childhood and he proved himself a great reconciler of Jnana Yoga and Karma Yoga in his life. Durga Saptashati-the story of the valour of Goddess Durga is a part of this Purana.

8. AGNI PURANA

This Purana has over 15,000 'shlokas'. It explains that the aim of Puranas is to propagate all kinds of knowledge among the general public. It gives stories of incarnations, Ramayana and Mahabharata, skills of construction of temples, performance of religious ceremonies and worship. It also gives an account of 'Jyotish Shastra', 'Dharma Shastra', Ayurvedic medicines, grammar, archery and armaments, politics and adminstration. It gives the tenets of 'Advaita Vedanta'. Just as there is vital air in a body, there is the power of fire in the 'Brahmanda' (Universe) to excite action. This thought is also discussed in this Purana.

9. BHAVISHYA PURANA

This Purana has over 14,000 'shlokas'. It describes the greatness of Sun and the secrets of its worship. It contains the description of how Lord Krishna's son

Samba, who was afflicted with leprosy, got cured by prayers to the Sun by a learned Brahmin from Saka island brought by Garuda. Sun works as the persuading power "Surya Atma Jagatastathusah". He is the Mover of animate and inanimate kingdoms. This Purana establishes the glory of the Sun. It also describes whatis going to happen in the future. Therefore,.it is named Bhavishya Purana. It also describes different royal dynasties in the 'kaliyuga'. It has five divisions viz. "Brahma Parva", "VishnuParva", "Shiva Parva", "Surya Parva" and "Pratisarga Parva".

10. BRAHMAVAIVARTA PURANA

This Purana contains 18,000 ‘shlokas’ in four divisions viz. “Brahma Khanda”, “Prakriti Khanda”, “Krishna Janma Khanda” and “Ganesha Khanda”. It contains description of the creation of the world, the evolution of Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, the story of Savitri and Radha, a description of Krishna’s life and an account of birth and activity of Ganesha. It also describes ‘Ayurveda Shastra’, etc. According to this Purana creation of the world comes out of Brahman. the world is a modification of Brahman. It is not the change of nature-‘vikara’ but a change into a reversible form - ‘vivarta’. The world, no doubt, is produced from Brahma, but that is not a transformation of its reality (like milk turned into curd which cannot become milk again). It is ‘maya’ (an illusive change) similar to water changing into ice that can become water again. Because of the reversible nature of change of Brahman into this manifestation this Purana is named Brahmavaivarta.

Note :

In the next eight Puranas, we find answers to questions like :

a) How can the basic principle Brahman be known?

b) Originally that basic principle is without form. Then how can we recognize Him in form?

c) How should a Jiva worship Him for his own felicity? ....etc. etc.

The prominent forms of Brahman are revealed in Shiva and Vishnu and the incarnations they take. The Linga Purana and Skanda Purana are associated with Shiva. Varaha Purana, Vamana Purana, Kurma Purana and Matsya Purana are relating to Vishnu and deal with the principle of Creation. In these we find instructions not only for removing pains in the world but also means of attaining liberation. In the Bhagvata it is said, "The all pervading Lord incarnates in human form not only for subduing demons and evil spirits but also for teaching mortals the right way to peace." The main aim of the teaching is how mortals can come out of this mundane worldliness and obtain blissful liberation. The Garuda Purana and Brahmanda Purana deal with the course of way the creatures take and what is the fate of life if one takes to `Karma' (Activity), `Jnana' (Knowledge) and `Upasana' (Worship). The Garud Purana describes the life after death and the Brahmanda.Purana describes the varied ways followed.

11. LINGA PURANA

This Purana has 11,000 'shlokas' and describes the worship of Lord Shiva in Linga form. In its first part it gives an account of the origin of Shiva worship, Lord Shiva describing the creation, eighteen incarnations of Lord Shiva and Shiva 'vratas' and Shiva 'tiraths' (auspicious days and places of pilgrimage) for the devotees of Lord Shiva. In its second part it gives a detailed explanation of 'Pashu', 'Paasha' and 'Pashupati' (Jiva, Bondage and the Lord) according to 'Shaiva tantras' and deep reflection on Shiva principle.

12. VARAHA PURANA

This Purana contains 24,000 'shlokas' and narrates the story of Varaha (the boar incarnation) of Maha Vishnu. It contains 'mantras' (formulae) and rules of devotional observances. It also contains description of 'tiraths' (holy places). It is stated in this Purana that the goddess of Earth prayed to Maha Vishnu and that prayer took the form of a goddess. This Purana is essentially Vishnu based.

13. SKANDA PURANA

Kartikeya, the son of Lord Shiva describes the Shiva principle in this Purana and contains 81,000 'shlokas'. It is over 4/5ths of Mahabharata which contains one lakh 'shlokas'. This Purana constitutes 'Samhitas' (Collection of Thoughts), 'Khandas' (Divisions), and 'Mahatmyas' (Glory of God). The six Samhitas are :

A) Sanat Kumara Samhita
b) Suta Samhita
c) Shankara Samhita
d) Vaishnava Samhita
e) Brahma Samhita
f) Saura Samhita

Another division of Skanda Purana is as follows:

a) Maheshwara Khanda
b) Vaishnava Khanda
c) Brahma Khanda
d) Kashi Khanda
e) Reva Khanda
f) Tapi Khanda
g) Prabhasa Khanda

The Suta Samhita of Skanda Purana is matchless in giving the description of Shiva worship. We learn from scholars and great masters that Shankarabhagvatpada (Shankaracharya) studied the "Yagnya Vaibhava Khanda" of Suta Samhita eighteen times and then wrote his famous commentaries on the Bhagvad Gita, the ten principle Upnishads and Brahma Sutra. The Suta Samhita describes both the Vedic and Tantric ways of worship. Because of this extraordinary quality of the book Madhavacharya, the Prime Minister of Vijaynagar Kingdom wrote `Tatparya Bodhini Tika' the authoritative and detailed explanation of the book published from Anand Ashrama Granthavali, Pune.

In the Sita Samhita there are four parts :

a) Shiva Mahatmya - Glory of Shiva

b) Jnana Yoga Khanda - description of 'Achara Dharma' (Customary Observation) and consideration on all sections of 'Hathayoga'

c) Mukti Khanda - the means of liberation.

d) Yagnya Vaibhava Khanda - the biggest of all above parts. In its first part we find a spiritual discussion on the principles of 'Advaita Vedanta' (Vedantic Monism) and 'Shaiva Bhakti' (Devotion to Shiva). In its second part we find the Brahma and Suta Gita. Description of self and attainment of self realization are given in a beautiful way. It is by the grace of Shiva that all our actions are crowned with success as is described in this Purana.

"There is no enjoyment without the grace of Shiva. There is no demigod pleased without the grace of Shiva. It is only by the grace of Shiva that people became believers in God."

"Shiva prasadena vina na bhuktayah,
Shiva prasadena vina na muktayah,
Shiva prasadena vina na devatah,
Shiva prasadena hi sarvamastikah."

14. VAMANA PURANA

This Purana contains 10,000 'shlokas' and pertains to the dwarf incarnation of Vishnu. Besides the description of Bhagwan Vamana, it contains the description of Shiva,

His glory, sacred places connected with Shiva (tiraths) mrriage of Shiva and Uma, birth of Ganesha and Kartikeya.

15. KURMA PURANA

This Purana contains 17,000 'shlokas' and pertains to creation, penance of Parvati and her one thousand names, glory of Kashi (Varanasi) and Prayaga (Allahabad). It also contains Ishwara Gita and Vyasa Gita the former giving description of realizing Shiva on the instance of Bhagvad Gita and the latter giving description of the four 'ashramas' (stages) of life and the Dharma to be followed. It also appears that there were four Samhitas in this book but as of now only Brahma Samhita is available.

16. MATSYA PURANA

It contains about 15,000 'shlokas'. Among other things this Purana contains :

a) A full arrangement of the contents of all the Puranas and a systematic evolution of Puranas.

b) A description of the lineage of the principle Rishis like Bhrigu, Angira, Atri, Vishwamitra, Kashyapa, Vasishtha, Parashara and Agastya.

c) A description of the 'Raja Dharma' (Duties of Kings).

d) A description of four ways of subduing a foe viz. 'Sama' (with love), 'Dhama' (temptation), 'Dhanda' (punishment) and 'Bhedha' (intrigue).

e) Durga, 'Yatra' (pilgrimage) and 'Sahaya Sampatti' (prosperity)

f) A description of the definition of idols of different deities (Pratima Lakshana) and a measure of their formation.

17. GARUDA PURANA

This Purana has 19,000 'shlokas'. In this Purana Vishnu has presented Garuda as a manifestation of the Universe. It dwells on the incarnation of Vishnu and method of testing of various jewels like emarald (markata), sapphire (Indra Nilamani), topaz (Pushparaja), a gem produced in Vidura (Vaidurya), Karaketana, Bhismaratna, Pulaka, Rudraksha, Crystal (Sphatic), etc. It also contains chapters on Politics, Ayurveda and treatment of various ailments, arrangement of medicines for treating animals, arrangement of medicine for purifying intellect, knowledge of prosody, 'Sankhya Yoga', essence of Gita, etc. Like Agni Purana this Purana is also an encyclopaedia of all branches of knowledge. This Purana in its latter part gives a description of :

a) What becomes of a man after death?

b) In which form is he born?

c) Which enjoyment does he like?

d) The state of life in mother's womb.

e) Path to the city of Yama (Yamanagar).

f) Dwelling place of the departed spirits.

g) Definition of departed soul (pretas).

h) Release from domain of the departed souls (preta yoni).

i) The form of pretas.

j) Life span of mortals.

k) Method of sependikaran (joining of departed souls of three generations with the dead).

l) Expanse of the Yama Loka (domain of Yama).

At the time of performing 'shradha' (sequel rites) recitations from the Garuda Purana are performed.

18. BRAHMANDA PURANA

This Purana has 12,000 'shlokas' and contains a description of the whole 'brahmanda' (universe). There is a special description of islands, 'grehas' (planets), stars and 'yugas' (ages) of the world. It also contains a description of Kshatriya dynasties of Indra. Indians carried this Purana to Java in the fifth Century and its translation in poetic language is available there. The "Uttara Gita" which Gaudapada has written is a gloss on a portion of this Purana. The Lord of Wind 'Vayu' taught this Purana to Vyasa. It is, therefore, also termed as Vayuprokta Brahmanda Purana.

CHAPTER - V

"INDIAN MYTHOLOGY"

"Paritranaye Sadhunam,
Vinashaya cha dushkrtam;
Dharma samsthapanarthaya,
Sambhavami yuge yuge."

..... (Gita, IV-8)

(For protection of the virtuous, for the extirpation of the evil doers and for establishment of 'Dharma' (Righteousness) on a firm footing, I am born from age to age.)

Mythology in the context does not necessarily mean imaginary or fictitious. The lexical meaning of 'myth' is story that originated in ancient times especially one dealing with ideas or beliefs about early history of a race or giving explanation of natural events such as seasons etc. Therefore, the Indian mythological gods refer to the power of Nature that drives all the universal phenomenon. Herein they refer to Vedic Gods.

Narayana asked Brahma to churn the oceans with the help of 'Suras' (Kashyap's sons by Aditi were called 'Suras' or 'Devas') and 'Asuras' (Kashyap's sons by Diti were called 'Asuras' or 'Danavas'). Churning of the ocean

would yield 'amrit' (nectar) for Gods which would enable them to vanquish the demons and become invincible. After receiving assent from the God of Ocean, they placed Tortoise God (Lord Vishnu in Tortoise form called 'Kurma Avatara') in the sea and Narayana through Indra placed mountain mandara, adorned with peaks on the Great Tortoise, Ananta, the God of snakes, agreed to be used for churning. So Mandara was the churning staff and Vasuki, the chord, with Suras on one side and Asuras on the other. As the churning was in progress, trees got uprooted, animals and birds got killed, fire, smoke, carcasses appeared on the water. At first only froth came up but no nectar. Gods were tired but Brahama on learning this strength. As the churning was continued, a bright moon appeared in the sea followed by Lakshmi dressed in white, the white steed, and 'kaustaba' gem which adorns the chest of Narayana. Then arose Dhanvantri with a white vessel in his hand containing the'amrit' (nectar). The churning was continued and 'halahal' (poison) appeared. Being dreadful for the sustenance of the three worlds, Brahma requested mahadev to save the creation. He drank the poison and held it in Mahadeva is called 'Nilkantha' (the bluethroated)

'Asuras' wanted both Lakshmi (the Goddess of Prosperity) as well as the 'Amrit' (the drink of immortality). They saw Dhanvantri going to Gods with the nectar and chased him. Narayana called his bewitching 'Maya' and assumed a female form of Mohini. 'Asuras', spellbound by her charm, agreed to have the nectar served by her. So the nectar was handed over

to her. Mohini made only the 'Surss' drink the nectar one by one through her 'Maya' and while they were doing so, one 'Asura' named Rahu sneaked into 'suras' side to get a chance to drink the 'amrit' As soon as the nectar was about to reach his throat the Sun and the Moon discovered it and communicated to Narayana who with his 'chakra' (disc) cut Rahu's neck so that the vectar did not go into his body. As his neck was cut his head rose to the sky and became immortal while his body fell to the ground. Moon with Rahu's head has arisen. It is believed that on the day of eclipse Rahu swallows sun or Moon.

When the 'Asuras' did not obtain the 'amrit', the fight continued between them and the 'Suras' for 32,000 years. Nara and Narayana played havoc with the 'Asuras' with their arrows and disc respectively. The latter plunged into the seas and hid themselves in caves and 'Patala' (bowel of the Earth). 'Suras' having won, rejoiced, placed the mountain Mandara at its own place and went to their abodes.

'Nagas' or 'Sarpas' dwell in the bowel of the Earth, caves and river sides. Vasuki is the God of Nagas. Most important among these is 'Shesha' which supports the Earth.

'Pishachas' and 'Rakshasas' are identified with 'Asuras'. 'Asuras' were good and godly at first. But with passage of time, they became proud, unruly, quarrelsome, shameless and lost 'Dharma'. They stopped visiting the 'tiraths' (holy places) and became sinful and Goddess Lakshmi forsook them.

Various Goods described in Indian Mythology are as under :

BRAHMA

Brahma is the personal form of impersonal Brahma which comprises all existence. He is the first Creator of all beings. They call him Prajapati. He created 'Devas', 'Rishis', mankind, the worlds, the Earth, the Oceans, the Rivers, the four quarters of Heavens and all that is there. He is also designated as 'Lokakrt', 'Trilokakrt', 'Dhatar' and often as 'Prajapati', 'Sarvalok Pitamaha' (everyone's grandfather), 'Lok Pitamaha', or only 'Pitamaha'. He is also called 'Svayambhu' (the Self-existing).

Brahma is the first and the highest Prajapati. He has seven Spiritual sons.

SURYA

Surya and Adhitya are the common names of Sun God. Adhityas came from Aditi (daughter of Daksha) after her marriage to Kashyapa. Their children are called Adhityas and they are twelve in number who are the rulers of the world.

Surya's wife is Tvastri Vadava - Rupa Dharini in the shape of a mare. Their daughter is Supraja who is married to Bhanu. Their son is named Yama. Surya's charioteer is Aruna, the God of Dawn.

INDRS

He is the head of 'Devas'. He killed a number of 'Asuras'. He also killed 'Asura' named Vritra by his thunderbolt. He is also called Mahindra, Devendra, Devanam Deva, Devraja, Sarvadeva and Chakra (meaning strong and mighty).

His wife Indrani is also called Mahindrani. His elephant who stands at the gate of 'Swarga' is called Airavat. His horse Uchchaihchraves, who appeared at the time of ocean churning, is white in colour with black tart.

Matali is his charioteer. The city where he stays is Amravati. It has 1000 gates on its periphery and bears all seasons, fruits and food. There is no fatigue, torment, grief, despondency, weakness, anger nor covetousness in his domain. All are content in a wholesome climate.

VARUNA AND MITRA

Varuna refers to the Light of Night and Mitra refers to the Light of Day. When combined they denote the highest radiance and glory.

In Mahabharata Varuna appears only as God of oceans, lakes and rivers. His wife is Siddhi or Varuni. His son Pushkara is married to Jyotisnakali who is Soma's daughter. Soma deemed Utathya to be suitable husband for his daughter. Soma's father Atri invited Utathya and handed over his grand daughter to him. Varuna had long desired her and therefore stole her from Utathya's hut. Utathya sent Narada to Varuna to return her but varuna

refused. Getting enraged Utathya, also called Agastya, drank the sea and rivers after performing some sacrifices. varuns wasand, therefore, compalled to return her to Utathya and the seas etc. ware restored bu Utathya.

VISHNU

After Vishnu, the name of Narayana and Hari are the most frequently used. Vishnu is also called Devdeva (God of Gods). He is enduring, unconquerable, imperishable and the everlasting Mighty God.

In Rig Veda Vishnu is often mentioned with Indra. His dwelling is on Mount Mandara. He is lotus-eyed with four arms and a mark of 'Shrivatsa' on his chest. He received this mark when Sage Bhardwaj threw water on him when he disturbed him while at prayers. He wears the divine 'Kaustaba'. His couch is Sheshnag or Ananta. He has a golden chariot of eight wheels, which moves as quick as thought. His sign or standard is Garuda. His weapons are 'Shankha', 'Chakra', 'Gada' and 'Sharang Dhanush'. His wife is 'Shri' or Lakshmi. His incarnations are Vamana, Varaha, Narasimha, Hayashras, Matsya, Rama, Krishna etc.

ASHVINS

The two divine Ashvins Nasatya and Dasra are beautiful and heavenly physicians. They are the offsprings of Tvastri and Savitar.

Once Sukanya, daughter of Saryati andwife of Chyavana who was Brighu's son, a beautiul and shapely

lady was bathing and the two Ashvins saw her and approached her. On learning that she was Chyavana's wife, they enquired why she had married an old person verging on death. They suggested to her to leave her old husband and go with them. She said that she being a devoted lady, they should not entertain any idea of her infidelity. Thereafter they told her that they are celestial physicians and are capable of making her husband young. After consulting her husband she gave the Ashvins their consent.

The Ashvins took them to the sea and told them to go in and followed themselves into the sea. When they came out, they all looked young and of the same shape. and beauty. They asked Sukanya to select her husband. She selected one of them who was actually Chyavana, her husband. Thereafter they went home happy and the Ashvins went to their abode in the Heaven.

SHIVA/RUDRA

Rudra often occurs in Rigveda (though Nilmata Purana says only three hymns are dedicated to Rudra in Rig Veda) whereas the name of Mahadeva is used for this great God in Mahabharata. He is considered to be the son of Brahma, sprung from his forehead. He dwells in Himavat (Kailash). He has four faces, with three eyes each which shine like the Sun, Moon and Agni. Shiva got his third eye, when He was followed by Uma and She smilingly placed Her both hands on His eyes. This created darkness everywhere and everything seemed to perish as if there were no Sun or Moon. He got His third eye

flamed like sun on his forehead and all darkness disappeared and life was sustained. He has ten arms arms and a blue neck. His conveyance is a white Bull, Vrishabha, with a black tail. His famous weapons are Pashupata which He gave to Arjuna and His are 'Phursa' which He gave to Parshurama. His trident ' Trishul' is another weapon He carries.

The Phallus worship forms an important part of Shiva cult, though Rig Veda abhors the very idea. This popular belief of Phallus worship seems to be ill conceived. It has become a source of generative power only in the post Vedic period. It certainly is not a sex mark. In the Linga Purana it is said that the foremost lingam which is primary and devoid of smell, colour, taste, hearing, touch, etc. is spoken as Prakrati. Linga means a mark, a symbol pointing to an inference. The vast world of countless forms is a lingam of omnipresent Lord. It is a symbol of Lord Shiva.

Among other names used for Shiva, the following appear often. Maheshwara, Kailashvasi, Bhutanatha, Jagatpati, Gangadhari, Jatadhari, Trilochana, Nilkantha, Kala-kala, Aushutosha, Mrtyunjaya, Shambhu and Shankara.

The personal setting for the supreme Godhead is clearly manifested in the Svetasvatra Upnishad which equated Shiva with Brahman. It puts the theory of creation thus :

Rudra alone, who stands before anything at the time of destruction and created the universe at the time

of origin, can be recognized as the Creator of all things that exist. He is the Supreme Lord of all souls. He is self subsistent mover of all unmoving manifold.

In the epic puranic tradition Linga is 'Purusha' while 'Yoni' is 'Prakrati' (male and female energies necessary for creation). Just as Linga is worshipped by Saivites, 'Shaligramashila' is worshipped by Vaishnavites. For the former it means Shiva and Parvati and for the latter it means Vishnu and Lakshmi. Mohenjodaro excavations reveal Shiva to be three faced, seated on a low Indian throne in a Yoga posture and on either side are four animals. In Ramayana Shiva appears as a popular God both in Northern as well as Southern India.

Megasthenes who lived in India towards the close of the fourth century B.C. tells us that wide popularity of Shiva worship in historical times is testified by various literary and archaeological sources.

There is an obscure indication in Linga Purana that the worship of Linga was introduced into the Brahminical faith at a later stage. In its seventeenth 'Adhyaya' the fiery linga is introduced for settling a dispute between Brahma and Vishnu for superiority. While they were in dispute, Shiva appeared and set aside their claim. To set these disputes apart, Trimurti concept was introduced. It is the manifestation of Supreme Spirit in three forms viz. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva - the Creator, Preserver and the Destroyer respectively. According to Brahmanism no one takes precedence over the other.

Markandeya says, "I perceive no difference between Shive who exists in the form of Vishnu and Vishnu in the form of Shiva. He who is Vishnu is Rudra and He, who is Rudra is Pitamaha (Brahma)."

The word Shankara means one who leads to the eternal bliss. Lord Shankara has sought out in Kashi a region yielding deliverance. Goswami Tulsidas says,"Why should everyone not enjoy his stay at Kashi, the treasure house of learning, the redeemer of sins?" Death in Kashi brings about liberation to the departed soul.

The establishment of Shiva Linga has diverse accounts in the Puranas. Shiva and Shakti (i.e. Parvati) together are identified as mystical dual 'Nada' (the Sound) and 'Bindu' (the Dot), former being male and latter the female. It is said that Shiva is Bhaga-wan, Parvati is symbolized as Bhaga and as Shiva is endowed with Bhaga hence, He is called Bhaga-wan.

There are in all twelve 'Jyotirlingams' of Lord Shiva in India at the following places :

1. Somnatha (Gujrat)
2. Malikarjuna (near Tirupati)
3. Mahakali (Ujjain)
4. Omkareshwara (Amleshvaram on Narmada)
5. Baijnatha (near Gaya)
6. Naganatha (in South India)
7. Kedarnatha (Gharwal)
8. Tryambaka (Nasik)
9. Rameshwaram (Ramnad District)
10. Bhima Shankara (near Pune)
11. Vishwanatha (Varanasi)
12. Grisneshwara (Gorkana in Karvara distt.)

It is said that if one remembers lord Shiva in these twelve places both morning and evening, he shall be absolved of sins of seven births.

According to a verse in Shiva Purana, Maheshwara, Shiva, Rudra, Pitamaha, Samsara, Vaidya, Sarvajna (omniscient) Parmatma, these eight names particularly refer to Shiva. "Om namo Bhagvate Vasudevaye", "Om namo Narayanaye", "Om namaha Shivaya", "Shri Ramaye namaha" and "Shri Krishnaye namaha", all these mantras (formulae) are salutations of one and the same deity.

According to ancient Ramayana, Shri Rama worshipped Shiva and Shakti at Rameshwaram about 5,00,000 years ago and Shri Krishna worshipped Shiva and Shakti about 5000 years ago. Both Shri Rama and Shri Krishna are the incarnations of Vishnu.

Shri Jaidayal Goendka, who it is said, that God revealed Himself to him in a four-armed form, has written on Shiva Tattva, to observe the following discipline while taking refuge in Shiva at an undefiled and neat place.

* Hear stories of God's love which reveal glories and mysteries of Lord Shiva.
* Adore and worship Shiva with faith and reverence.
* Pray and sing hymns of Shiva in a weeping and faltering voice to develop intense love for Shiva.
* Utter "Om namaha Shivaya" while breathing with love and faith.
* Meditate on Lord shiva in a reverential and disinterested way.

Besides, in one's day to day behaviour one should behave affectionately with all other beings, and should serve others without expecting a reward. One should feel the grace of Lord Shiva in all circumstances, agreeable or disagreeable. One should cultivate virtue, good conduct and renounce vices. One should regularly practise 'Japa' with faith and absorb oneself in Lord Shiva.

GANDHARVAS

Gandharvas are the musicians of Heavens. They sing beautiful melodies and use 'Veena' as their instrument.

YAMA

He is entrusted with keeping mankind under check and controls all beings without distinction. His charioteer is 'Roga' (sickness). His weapons are staff and a noose. He is considered the ruler of the 'Pitraloka'.

MARUTS

They are the Gods of Wind. Their function is to protect Indra during his battles from his enemies.

RBHUS

They constitute the highest class of Gods who neither need austerities, sacrifices nor 'amrita'.

RISHIS

They are seven Rishis called 'Sapta Rishis'. The seven Mandalas of the Rig Veda are attributed to them.

SADHYAS AND SIDDHAS

They are a kind of 'Siddhas' (blessed spirits) often mentioned in Mahabharata.

VASUS

There are eight Vasus, and they are considered as Prajapati Manu's sons. Agni is considered as the Lord of Vasus.

YAKSHASAS

Their function is to protect Prince Kubera, the God of Riches.

CHAPTER - VI

"SOME ANECDOTES FROM PURANAS"

"Indryani paranyahur,
Indriyebhyah param manah;
Manasastu parà buddhiryo,
Buddheh paratastu sah."

..... (Gita, III-42)

(The senses are said to be greater than body; but greater than senses is the mind. Greater than mind is the intellect and greater than intellect is He - the Self.)

Some anecdotes of Hindu Mythology and Culture and social status are as under :

1. Though Rig Veda refers to an attack by Rudra on Prajapati but later documents give the details more clearly. It is said that Prajapati cast his eyes on His own daughter desiring pairing with her as He was confronted with the problem of manning the 'Srishti' i.e. the world He had created. He also asked Gods to pair with women. In doing so the creation of mankind was achieved. Some of the Gods did not take kindly to this and said Prajapati had committed a sin to pair with His own daughter. They requested Rudra to pierce His arrow through him. Rudra aimed and pierced His arrow with the result that His seed fell on the ground. When the anger of Gods diminished,

they removed the arrow and applied remedies to Prajapati. Prajapati later became Brahma and Gayatri appeared as a woman from half of His body. Brahma mistakenly took Her as His daughter. Seeing Her form and exquisite beauty He fell in love and started making love to Her. This was not liked by Brahma's sons who took Gayatri as their sister. Expressing their indignation and contempt, Brahma felt shameful while He continued making love to Gayatri and tried to turn His head away from Her but at the same time created four heads facing four directions, so that He could continue seeing Her undisturbed. Seeing Brahma in such a state, Gayatri set off towards Heavens but Brahma Created His fifth head on top looking towards Her.

F. Max Mueller has his own explanation of this action of Brahma. He says that Brahma is Surya (Sun) and his daughter Gayatri is actually what is called Savitri who appears in the eastern horizon before sunrise. Savitri is all radiance and beauty and as She sees Sun rising close by, She runs away and Sun chases Her.

2. Brahma once asks Narada, His son, to marry and create children to inhabit the Earth created by Him. Narada was a different person interested in devotion to Krishna (Narayana) and therefore, denounced his father. Brahma cursed Narada condemning him to a life of sensuality and subjection to women. Narada retorted by a counter curse with which Brahma would lose all His worshippers. There is hardly any temple for Brahma as compared to Vishnu, His incarnations and Shiva.

3. In the Puranic legends, Shiva behaves like a Father who retains His virility and castrates His son as a rival. It is said that parvati was taking a bath while Shiva was away. There was none at the gate to prevent anyone from coming in while She was naked taking a bath. So from a little clay, with which She was removing Her dirt, She produced a mouldof clay and from it produced Ganesha and told Him to sit at the gate and not allow anyone to enter till He would hear from Her. Lo and behold, Shiva came and tried to enter unobstructed. But Ganesha under instructions from His mother would not allow Him to enter. This enraged Shiva and a fight ensued during which Shiva severed the neck of Ganesha. When Shiva entered, Parvati enquired Ganesha's head Parvati told Him that He was Their son. They both felt bad and Shiva managed to replace His head by a baby elephant's head and dthat is how Ganesha has got His form with an elephant head.

In other legends, it is said, that Sri Krishna or Parshurama had a fight with Ganesha on some account and with the help of Shiva's battle axe, Ganesha's one tusk was cut off.

4. Adi was an enemy of Shiva and wanted to kill Him. He took the form of a snake and stealthily entered Shiva's house. Upon entering the house, he assumed the form of Parvati with an intention to seduce Him and kill Him. Shiva understood and struck Adi and killed him.

5. It is said that Ila once entered Shiva's room when He was dallying with Parvati. Shiva had ordered that no one should enter the house. Shiva got furious on Ila and furned him into a woman.

6. Chandreshvra was highly devoted to Shiva worship. He used to tend his father's cows and milch them. While doing so he would retain a little milk for pouring on Shiva's idol during his regular worship. His father did not like this idea of the son and said that he was wasting milk and they could earn if they sold it instead. The child, however, continued using a little milk in his worship. One day when he was about to pour milk, his father tried to obstruct him. The son hit the father's feet with the staff he had, lest he should come in the way of his devotion of pouring milk. As his father felt maimed, the staff took the form of Shiva's axe and Shiva and Parvati appeared. They took Chandreshvra to Heavens and forgave his father.

7. Sakkiya was a worshipper of Shiva but his nature of worship was strange and unusual. He would go to a certain Shiva temple everyday and throw a stone at the Linga. One day it so happened that he forgot to visit the temple and throw a stone as was usual with him. When he was about to have his dinner he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten to go to the temple. He at once rushed out and when he aimed a stone on the Linga, Shiva and Parvati appeared. They expressed their happiness over Sakkiya and took him to Heavens.

8. Tinnan, a worshipper of Shiva would regularly offer food to Shiva in a temple. His method of offering was strange. He would take cooked food in abundance which occupied both his hands leaving no scope to carry water.

Therefore, he would take a mouthful of water and traverse a long distance uphill to reach the temple. There he would keep the food before Shiva's idol and pour out the mouthful of water on it to quench its thirst. one day, when he was placing the food in the temple, he observed that one eye of Shiva's idol was bleeding. He took out one of his eyes and offered it to Shiva to replace the bleeding eye. Having done this, however, shiva's second eye. also started to bleed. This left no choice for Tinnan but to offer his second eye. He was about to take out the second eye when Shiva appeared and stopped him from taking out his second eye. Shiva restored the first eye of Tinnan as well and his eyesight. He made him equal to Himself.

9. Ati Pattar was a fisherman. To redeem his sins he would throw back the biggest fish of his catch into sea. It so happened that for many days in succession, he could have only one fish in his catch and in deference to his pledge he would throw it back into the sea. He had as such no other source of income and this reduced his family to starvation. Inspite of this he did not give up this pledge. One day when he threw his net into the sea, after sometime, he felt it somewhat heavy. Expecting a big catch, he pulled up the net and found to his amazement that there was a fish like object studded with gold and precious stones. Since, it was the only catch of the day he threw it back into the sea as per his pledge. He was not tempted at the sight of gold and precious stones in the object. Being a worshipper of Shiva , to whom he had made the pledge, Shiva appeared before him and flowers were showered on him from the Heavens.

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JAMMU

10. Putana, the child harming demoness seems to be a well known character in folklore. In the Jewish folklore, Putana has a parallel in Linth, the child murderess. Lamiya, the queen of Libya is also said to have changed herself to a child lifter.

11. The uprooting of twin trees by Lord Krishna as a baby shows that the presence of twin trees in the vicinity of a house was considered inauspicious. This can be guessed from the belief that the birth of twins, both of the same sex, causes disaster.

12. The episode of taking away the clothes of cowherdesses brings out how nudity was denounced by Lord Krishna.

13. It seems that 'Avatara' does not mean actual descent of God but it is only another form of His. According to Bhagvata Purana, 'Avatara' signifies the divine descent into earthly form and symbolizes the passage from the unconditioned to the conditioned form.

14. According to Gonda, importance of Boar incarnation of Lord Vishnu is because Boar occupies an important place in the folk tradition. The fish incarnation shows that out of all aquatic animals and creatures, fish was thought to be of great importance, as in the folk tradition it is a symbol of conjugal happiness. Its offering is thought to be efficacious in marriage rites as recorded in Grhya Sutras. The God of Love having fish as his emblem supports this conclusion.

15. The domination of serpent as the supreme deity in Egypt, Sumeria, India and some other countries of ancient world has been proved by Oldhams, Vogal etc.

In the Rig Vada, serpent is considered a potential Lord, that is to be dreaded and not harmed.

The Ocean Lord of Japan is a big serpent. The Wular lake in Kashmir is said to be haunted by a serpent named Padmanagasaras.

16. 'Apam Napat' and 'Ahirbudhnya' seem to be identified with Agni. In the Vedic literature 'Ahirbudhnya' is symbolically associated with the domestic fire. In the post Vedic literature it is associated with one of the names of Rudra and Shiva. Divinity 'Ahirbudhnya' is associated with 'Apam Napat' and these get identified with Agni and Rudra.

17. The word seven is a mystic expression generally used to denote a great expanse or great volume or entity. In the Rig Veda we have 'Saptasandhavah' meaning totality of waters, 'Saptapadi' meaning totality of unity, 'Saptasapti' which is used for Sun whose chariot is driven by seven horses which cover all space, 'Saptatala-vrksha' used for the height of Ravana.

18. The idea of lotus as a symbol of the womb goes back to Rig Veda. The oldest reference to it is obviously where it is said that the Semen of Mitra and Varuna collected on the lotus to create Vasishtha. In the later literature when Vishnu came into prominence, the act of the creation of lotus, the pivot of procreation, was ascribed to Him. Another aspect of the myth of primeval lotus is the erect position of the stalk. The concept of erect position of the stalk and that of the linga coincides. A belief was in vogue that a lady who had a miscarriage was made to take a bath in a lotus pond obviously to strengthen her womb.

19. 'Shapa' (curse) means infliction of punishment. This word occurs in Rig Veda. It is related to the wreaking of mind a strong psychic force which may affect either the utterer or the person on whom directed.

It is said in Bhagvata Purana that Vidura was born due to a curse on Yama when he came to take Sage Mandevya's life, after he had committed a sin of pricking a thorn into a butterfly. He told Yama after pleading innocence that since He was taking the life of a Brahmin, He be born a 'Shudra' for a hundred years. Thus, was Yama born as a 'Shudra'.

In Bhagvata Purana it is said, Jara the daughter of Kala who tried to show amorous behaviour to Narada, who was a celibate throughout his life, cursed him to be a constant wanderer, when he did not yield to her such behaviour.

God Vishnu's watchmen Jaya and Vijaya obstructed Gods and Sages who were going to enquire about the remedy for the foetus in Diti from Kashyapa, which she kept for a hundred years. The watchmen were cursed and were later born as Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashyapa. They were later killed by Lord Vishnu only to get united with Him.

Nalakubera and Manigriva were twin sons of Kubera. They were having water sport with women while in an intoxicated condition. Narada advised them not to do so but they did not bother. Cursed by Narada they were born as twin trees and stayed there for a 100 yeard and were ultimately released by Lord Krishna when He uprooted these as a child.

In the Svyambhuva Manvantra, Prajapati Marichi had six sons from his wife Urna. Once these six sons laughed at Prajapati as he was to be united with his daughter. Prajapati cursed them to be 'Asuras' for showing disrespect to elders. They were all born as sons of Hiranyakashyapa. The Goddess Yogamaya snatched them from their chamber when they were very small and kept them one after the other as foetuses of Devki, the mother of Lord Krishna. As they were born, Kansa killed them one by one.

Bali was cursed by Shukracharya while he was performing a 'Yagya' for grant of glory on himself. While the 'Yagya' was in progress, Vamana appeared at the doorstep of Bali for a demand of three steps of land. Bali would not say no to his demand, benevolent as he was. Shukracharya directed him not to leave the 'Yagya' till it was complete. But Bali left to listen to the prayer of the dwarf guest. As he left, Shukracharya cursed him thus, "Thou having transgressed my order, shall be devoid of glory."

Parikshit was once on a hunt. Being exhausted, he entered the hermitage of Sage Sanuka. The Sage was in deep meditation and did not know who had entered the hermitage. Parikshit got enraged as no one, not even the Sage greeted and served him, he being the king. He went out and got a dead snake and put it round the Sage's neck. When the son of the Sage returned from the forest, he discovered that the king Parikshit had come and put the snake round his father's neck. He cursed him

to die of fa snake bite. King Parikshit learnt about the curse and to escape a snake bite, he built his chamber on a high prop. Inspite of this, he was bitten to death by a serpent 'Taksha'.

Pandu was cursed by a Sage when the latter had taken the form of a deer and was copulating with his wife who had taken the form of a female deer. Pandu killed the deer with his arrow and the Sage appeared and cursed him that he would die the moment he would copulate with his wife.

20. Tulsi plant is considered to be auspicious. This plant is said to be very dear to Lord Vishnu. The plant is useful for its very hygienic value. It is said that Vishnu marries Tulsi on the twelfth day of the bright half of Kartika. Vishnu goes to sleep on the eleventh day of bright half of Ashad and gets up on the eleventh day of the bright half of Kartika. When He gets up the first thing that happens is His marriage with Tulsi which symbolizes the growth of World. Tulsi keeps waiting for Vishnu in the courtyard till He wakes up. This is the reason why Tulsi is planted in the courtyards and prayers are offered to it by the household.

21. Dhruva grass has been shown reverence from the time of Rig Veda. In the Satapatha Brahmana, Dhruva grass is identified with breath and vital sap. It is symbolic of longevity and procreation.

22. In Athar Veda, Chapter 10, a sukta speaks about Ayodhya thus :

The city of Gods, Ayodhya has eight 'Chakras' and nine doors. In it there is a golden body covered with light.

Some authors feel that the golden body is the human body with eitght nervous plexuses and nine openings viz. mouth, two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, annus and urine outlet.

23. In the 164th hymn of the first Mandala of Rig Veda, the 20th verse is translated as "Two birds similar to each other, sit on the same tree. Of the two one eats the tasteful fruit thereof and the other not eating looks on the first." This is a symbolic expression of philosophical theory

The two birds are Purusha, the ego which is yet in a state of neiscience and the Purusha, the ego which has attained self realization. It can be interpreted in reference to God and man.

24. Vishnu Purana says "Gods in Heaven say that those among them will be fortunate indeed, who at the end of their sojourn in Heavens will be reborn as men in Bharata which is the gateway both to Heavens and self realization.

25. Markandeya Purana says, "That which man can do is impossible of achievement by Gods and Demons. The prosperity comes to the lion like man who strives for it. They are cowards who say it is a gift of destiny."

26. Religious thought in India has never been static. It has shown a tremendous power of assimilating new trends while keeping intact its main principles to adapt itself to changing environment. As always happens in such cases, theologians take up the work of recasting the framework at the top but popular opinion particularly at lower levels spontaneously undergoes changes which theologians have to rationalize and incorporate.

27. The rise to supreme position of the Trinity i.e. Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra came in the later Vedic period. The importance of Brahma (other than Hiranyagarbha) was clear and His position as Creator was high and yet He did not become an object of worship. Having created the universe and laws governing it, He had to do nothing more, therefore people thought it was no use running to Him for help in their difficulties. Vishnu, the Preserver is the object of worship because man wants protection, health, wealth and a hundred other objects everyday.

Rudra (other names being Shiva or Shankara) means good. The Hindu concept of creation (Srishti) and dissolution (Pralaya) are only phases in the life of Universe which is beginningless and endless, as God Himself. Dissolution is similar to sleep. Individuals sleep but their minds do not intermingle in that state. On waking each takes its own thread. A similar thing takes place on a cosmic scale. After dissolution, a new universe has got to come into existence again. There can neither be a permanent residence in the Heavens nor a permanent exile to Hell. A cycle of births and deaths goes on. For an individual who achieves 'Moksha' (self realization), the seemingly eternal journey from one birth to another will come to an end. For the individual, Rudra will have thus become Shiva as this verse speaks, "Yato Rudra Shiva tanurghor." It means that Rudra, that face of Thine which is shiva and peaceful.

In Bhartrihari, there is a verse which means, "Those who want worldly prosperity, power, happiness worship Vishnu, while those who want to probe the inner mysteries of the ego and are prepared to deny themselves the pleasure of life worship Shiva.

28. There were additions to the Pantheon in the later years. The main amongst these were :

* Ganesha or Vinayaka, to prevent any disturbance in the performance of 'Yajnas' and occurance of disease or distress.

* Surya, though being a Vedic God, His worship had fallen into background with the giving up of 'Yajnas'. When 'Sakas' came to India, Surya worship was revived through their priests. At first Surya was shown in a 'Shilwar' and high boots, but later it got modified into its present form.

* Hanuman, came into limelight with the spread of the story of Rama. He is worshipped in reverence to the selfless devotion He displayed for Shri Rama.

* 'Mantras' for each Graha viz. Mars, Jupiter, etc. were chanted for the good luck of a man and to ward off evil from him.

29. The last about a thousand years have seen a decline in the development of Hindu Religion because of the foreign rule which started with the invasion of India by Muslims and later by the Britishers etc. This robbed

Hindus from self confidence and character but the spark of fspiritual strength enabled them to fight back though with unequal strength, for political freedom which often ended in defeat and suppression. During this period Bhakti Cult emerged. Then the Arya samaj movement came which spread the philosophy of Vedas. This was follwed by the missions of Swami Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda whose object was to spread Vedanta. Then Sri Aurobindo did much to popularize the ideas of hierarchy of Gods and Goddesses, superir souls possessing mysterious occult powers and of people whose spiritual development was far beyond the others.

With independence of the country from Foreign rule, Hindus are again on their path of development, religious and otherwise.

CHAPTER - VII

"HINDUISM - THE WAY OF HUMAN LIFE"

"Samam kayashirogrivam,
Dharayann achalam sthirah;
Samprekshya nasikagram svam,
Dishash chanavalokayan."

..... (Gita, VI-13)

"Prashantatma vigatabhir,
Bramachari-vrate sthitah;
Manah Samyamya machitto,
Yukta asita matparah."

..... (Gita, VI-14)

(Holding the trunk and neck straight and steady, remaining firm and fixing the gaze on the tip of his nose without looking in other directions, firm in the vow of complete chastity and fearless, keeping himself perfectly calm and with the mind held in restraint and fixed on Me, the vigilant Yogi should sit absorbed in Me.)

Religion, according to Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, is an experience which affects our entire being, ends our disquiet, our anguish and our sense of aimlessness of fragile and fugitive existence. The mystics claim that realization of His yearning is far richer and deeper than the deepest satisfaction of this world.

Annie Besant has noted that she finds no religion so perfect or so philosophical or so spiritual as Hinduism. She says that the more you know it, the more you love it, the more you try to understand it and the more deeply you value it. According to her, India has no future without Hinduism, as it is the soil into which its roots are stuck.

Hinduism has an unbroken history of 5000 years which can be divided into the following periods :

* Vedic Period (About 2000 BC - 500 BC)
* Sutra Period (500 BC - 200 BC)
* Epic Period (200 BC - 300 AD)
* Puranic Period (300 AD - 750 AD)
* Darsana Period (750 AD - 1000 AD)
* Medieval Period (1000 AD - 1400 AD)
* Rise of 'Bhakti' (Devotional) Movement (1400 AD - 1800 AD)
* Modern Period (1800 AD Onwards)

VEDIC PERIOD

Vedas attributed to the 'Rishis' and other Seers have spread for centuries by oral communication, till these were compiled in a written form. At first two Gods rose into prominence viz. Indra, the God of Power and Varuna, the God of Righteousness but neither rose to supreme rank. This was the age of 'Mantras' and was succeeded by the age of Brahamanas. In this age, the four castes

and four stages of life were formulated. In the latter period Prajapati, Vishnu and Shiva rose into prominence. Thereafter, priesthood became powerful. This was followed by Aranyakas, the age of priests and Upnishad.

SUTRA PERIOD

This is the period of advent of Buddhism, which gained popularity due to the priesthood effect on Hinduism. Buddhism may not have been an all pervading religion of India as a whole but many kingdoms and states adopted Buddhism or Jainism from time to time. Inspite of this it did not supersede the orthodox Vedic religion. Buddhism died because of its overemphasis on monastic life, substitution of individual reason for authority of Vedas as a guide in religious matters and absence of any object of worship which could satisfy the longing of hearts.

EPIC PERIOD

It is the time when Indians went abroad and colonized Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Malaya, Indo- China and established kingdoms, some of which were ruled by Indian Princes.

Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagwad Gita, Laws of Manu, Code of Yajnavalkya, some Upnishads, some Puranas and some philosophical Sutras belong to this period. The doctrine of 'Avataras' started in this period. The main features of development of this period are :

* Conception of Impersonal Absolute and Personal God.

* Supreme Authority of Vedas.
* Law of Karma and Rebirth.
* System of Caste and Stages of Life.
* Threefold path of Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga.
* Doctrine of Hindu Trinity, Incarnation of Avataras.
* Doctrine of Ishta Deva (Chosen Deity).
* Ritual of image worship.
* Sectarian belief and practice.
* Faith in pilgrimage to holy shrines, etc.

PURANIC PERIOD

300 to 400 AD is considered to be the golden age in the history of Hindu Rule in India. In this age :

* Sectarian Puranas were composed.
* Organized worship of 'Shakti' (Mother Goddess) was started.
* Philosophical sutras of six orthodox schools of Hindu thought were written viz. Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Miamsa and Vedanta. Each school is called 'Darshana'.

DARSANA PERIOD

Mythical poets and philosophers defeated Buddhism in this period. In Southern India twelve mystical poets known as Alvars wandered singing about Vishnu. Sixty three mystical poets Nayanars sang about Shaivism.

Kumarila, the founder of Miamsa school of Hindu thought took his stand on the infallibility of Vedas and necessity of performing rites and ceremonies as per Vedas. Shankara, the greatest exponent of Advaita Vedanta was born a Brahmin in 788 AD in North Travancore. He wandered throughout India and set up monasteries at Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri, Sringeri (Mysore state) and Kanchipuram. His Advaita system of philosophy is based on Upnishads, Vedanta Sutra and Bhagwad Gita.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD

This period was marked by rise of devotional movement first in the South and then in the North. Hindu teachers clung to their religion despite Muslim conquests leading to forcible conversions, destruction and desecration of temples.

RISE OF DEVOTIONAL MOVEMENT IN NORTH INDIA

Fifteenth and sixteenth century was purely Vaishnavites centring round incarnations of Vishnu viz. Shri Rama, Krishna. Ramananda was the leader of the movement centred round Rama. The order of ascetics founded by him were called Ramanandis. Tulsidas belonged to this order. Sant Kabir and Guru Nanak owed inspiration to Ramananda.

Chandidas and Mira Bai were best known poets singing songs for Radha and Krishna. Vallabha and Chaitanya were other two important teachers.

MODERN HINDUISM

This period begins from about 1800 AD when Hinduism was at its lowest ebb.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) was the founder of Brahmo Samaj. He brought about the end of cruel customs viz. Sati, etc. Dwarkanath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen became leaders of Brahmo Samaj. Later this Samaj broke up.

Swami Dayananda (1824-1883) started Arya Samaj and unified all sections of Hindus.

Mrs. Annie Besant (1847-1933) played an Important part in this renaissance. She started a Hindu College at Benaras, which later became Benaras Hindu University.

Swami Ramakrishna (1836-1886) attained realization of the Absolute through worship. He was not a scholar and had no book learning. All his knowledge was through oral tradition and his own hold on experiments in religion and Spiritual Power.

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950), Rabindra Nath Tagore (1863-1941) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) were greatly responsible for the present renaissance.

EXPERIENCE IN HINDUISM

In our own individual lives how often are we prone to forget that a knowledge of scriptures is not knowledge of God. "I know only the scriptural texts but not the Atman" (Br. Upnishad). While Shruti whispers into our ears, "This Atman cannot be gained by study of Veda nor by intellect nor by much learning" (Katha Upnishad) and likewise, "Nor is the Atman to be gained by one destitute of strength nor by one lacking in earnestness. It is not to be gained by false austerities" (Mund. Upnishad) and again "Let a Brahmin renounce learning and become as a child like mind. Let him become an ascetic. And when he has made an end of the ascetic state as well as non ascetic state, he becomes Brahmin indeed (Br. Upnishad).

"The path of spiritualism is narrow with deep gulfs on either side, sharp as a razor edge and hard to traverse, it is that difficult path, so the sages say" (Katha Upnishad). "Whatever is here, the same is there. Whatever is there, the same is here. He goes from death to death who sees diversity here" (Katha Upnishad).

The formulae of Hindu philosophy and religion are:

a) Four classes of living beings :

* Those born of uterus like men and animals.
* Those born of egg like birds.
* Those born of moisture like insects, worms.
* Those born of earth like plants.

b) Four ages of civilization :

* Satyayuga, Tretayuga, Dvaparyuga and Kaliyuga.

c) Four classes of ancient society :

* Brahmin, Vaishya, Kshatriya and Shudra.

d) Four stages of ideal life of individual :

* Brahamcharya, Grihast, Vanaprasth and Sanyas Ashrama.

e) Four ends of human life :

* Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.

f) Four states of consciousness :

* Waking, Sleeping, Dreaming, and Turiya (Godhood).

g) Four levels of 'Gunas' :

* Rajoguna, Tamoguna, Satoguna and Prakriti.

"Religion lives not in books and temples but in the minds and hearts of men. When people say sacrifice to this God, sacrifice to that God, each God is only His manifestation."

..... (Br. Upnishad)

The central teaching of Upnishads may be said to be compressed in the following verse from Katha Upnishads.

"The one Ruler,
the inner self of all beings,
who makes His one form manifold;
the wise who perceive Him,
themselves have everlasting happiness,
It comes not to them, who perceive Him not."

So long as we do not see unity in diversity of things, we are far from our goal. God, Nature and Man are bound by a mystic bond. Self of Man and Self of all beings in the world are at the bottom of the same Universal Self and one highest happiness consists of realizing this unity in diversity. The Rishis and Seers who have written Upnishads had a vivid experience of God's presence in the cavern of heart. Unless one brings knowledge into practice and thereby God into one's mind, life cannot be said to have derived any benefit from such knowledge. It is not Bhagwad Gita that will save us but Krishna, that it reveals. Gita is a way to Krishna.

Western critics generally charge that Hinduism is too other-worldly, it teaches men to turn away from this world and its problems, cultivates a spirit of monkish piety and care only for their salvation. This seems to be a wrong notion on their part. Hindu scriptures think of society as a whole. Lord Krishna asks Arjuna to do his duty to society as a Kshatriya Prince and make the world safe from tyranny of evil rule. Arjuna wanted to flee but the Lord persuades him otherwise. Hindu thinkers have much wider conception of society and more penetrating vision of the evolving universe than the Western critics.

Ishta Deva is the God or Goddess of one's choice which represents the Supreme Deity for the worshipper. Adoption of Ishta Deva seems to be due to the fact that worshipper could concentrate on one God or Goddess of his choice instead of so many in our scriptures. In Bhagwad Gita Lord Krishna has said that one may worship in any manner or any God, the prayer reaches Him. For Swami Ramakrishna the Ishta Devi was Kali. The convention of use of Ishta Deva goes back to the Vedic age. In the Vedic hymns each God was represented as supreme by turn.

Faith is an indispensable element of spiritual life. All rites, ceremonies have to be performed with faith. All offerings have to be made with faith. All austerities are to be performed with faith and all worship is to be conducted with faith. Faith, it is said, moves mountains. The enemy of faith is 'samasya' (doubt).

According to Hindu Philosophy the soul of a man is essentially pure and divine. It is only on account of its birth in a body that it is temporarily subjected to certain limitations and hence becomes shortsighted, ignorant and deluded and is liable to go wrong and commit sin. This philosophy is at variance with the Christian doctrine of original sin according to which human nature is said to be corrupt. This seems to be a figurative way of saying that man by his very nature is sinful.

Some men are born with a very strong tendency for Godly life and others towards an Ungodly life. Predominance of 'Sattva' leads to the former and that of 'Rajas' and 'Tamas' leads to the latter disposition.

Release of such limitation can be had by 'yoga' i.e. through self control, disinterested service, devotion and realization of oneness of all things in the deity worshipped.

Hinduism, unlike Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism has no single founder. It is an ethnic religion like Judaism which grew along with the nation. It is inextricably associated with the customs and manners, the social institutions and ways of thought of a particular people.

The primary authority of Hinduism is 'Shruti' consisting of the four Vedas. In these and the Upnishads the records of religious experience of various types are available which form the fountainhead of Hinduism. The teachings and the experiences of the Rishis, Seers, Mystics and Poets constitute the source of Hindu religion.

The secondary authority of Hinduism are 'Smriti' i.e. written commentaries e.g. Itihasa, the Puranas, the Darsanas and the Agamas.

The practice of extolling one God as the greatest when He is subject of adoration is called Monotheism. When there is plurality of Gods, then it is called polytheism. Apparently the religion of early Vedic people was entirely polytheistic.

The Brahamanas are ritual text books containing mainly practical directions regarding the performance of sacrifices. During the period of Brahamanas, priests were strong and some claimed themselves to be seers though they never made any new hymn. Rituals assumed more importance than the basic tenets of religion.

Ramayana and Mahabharata are the famous Hindu Epics comprising seven and eighteen books ('Kandas' and 'Parvas') respectively. According to Jacobi and Macdonald the original portion of Ramayana Book II to VI is a homogeneous text by Valmiki. Books I and VII are later additions. Ramayana has been composed before 500 BC and the later additions came in the 2nd century BC. However, this is disputed by Hindu Theologeans. Mahabharata is an encyclopaedic work consisting of a lakh 'shlokas' in its present form. It is divided into 18 books called 'Parvas'.

CHAPTER - VIII

"NILMATA PURANA"

"Ananya chintayanto mam,
Ye janah paryupaste;
Tesham nityabhiyuktanam,
Yogakshemam vahamyaham."

..... (Gita, IX-22)

(The devotees, however, who bank on no one else, constantly think of Me and worship Me in ever-zealous and disinterested spirit, to these ever united in thought with Me, I bring full security and personally attend to their needs.)

Nilmata Purana, it is believed, has been written in the 6th and 7th century A.D. when the influence of Buddhism had receded under the Kushan rule and Brahamanism was reviving. This Purana gives mostly the picture of ancient Kashmir and is considered a supplement to Rajatarangini. The former generally makes a mention of the people, their life and society, the latter mentions about kings, queens, ministers, etc.

The land of Kashmir was a huge lake for the first six 'manvantras'. In the seventh 'manvantra', the water was drained off through an outlet made with the plough of Ananta on the orders of Vishnu, who had come with Gods and Goddesses to kill the demon Jalodbhava,

who was considered invincible under water. After Jalodbhava's death, Kashyapa settled 'Pishachas', the descendants of Manu, alongwith 'Nagas' who were the original inhabitants of the valley. Modern geological studies confirm the existence of the lake and draining off the waters near Baramulla.

Their were four sub-divisions of society with Brahmins highly honoured but no Shudra was considered degraded. Humane treatment was extended to all including servants. Ladies were respected and their was no restriction to their movement. In fact, they would move with their menfolk for amusement, music, dance and other means of recreation.

All cults viz. Vishnu, Surya, Durga, Naga, Buddha flourished side by side. Naga cult was deeply rooted and other cults adopted Naga deities.

Nilmata gives the theistic view as per Epics and other Puranas. It has 1396 verses and more than one-third deals with the instructions of Nila which are followed by the people of Kashmir. It gives an account of auspicious days and when fasts should be observed and some of these are true even at present.

It is believed that after King Yudhishtra was driven away, his minister Pratapaditya occupied the throne of Kashmir. Later Jayandra was the ruler and he was also forced to give up the throne by his Minister Sandhi Mali who was also to retire. Then came Meghavana whose grandsons Hiranya and Tornmana fell against each other to make place for Matra Gupta. All this seems to have taken place in the 5th or 6th century A.D.

The picture of Kashmir presented in this Purana though not complete in itself nevertheless is significant for its value. It is rich in geographical data and shows familiarity of its people with those of India. The original inhabitants of Kashmir were Nagas followed by Pishachas and the Manavas. There was no disregard for ladies and no check on their movement in society, hence their participation in feasts and festivals.

This Purana gives a list of 63 'vrtas' and 'utsavas' some of which are :

* 'Asvayuji Mahah' or 'Kaumudi' for commemoration of Nikhumbhas return and killing of Pishachas.
* 'Sukha Suptika' or 'Kartik Amavsi' for worship of Goddess Lakshmi.
* 'Divotthana' for making Vishnu sleep in 'Ashada' to be waken up four months later.
* 'Nava Samvatsara Mohotsava', first day after 'Kartik Purnamashi'. On first 'Margeshirsa' is observed the new year to commemorate Kashyapa's bringing land out of water in Kashmir.
* 'Saptamyah', 7th 'Shakula Margeshirsa' for Sun worship.
* 'Magh Purnima', for worship of the Moon.
* 'Uttrayana', bath of Vishnu and Shiva in purified butter and worship for three months.

* 'Tararatrih', 14th of dark fortnight of Magha. A bath is taken in a river or pool and seven handfuls of water are offered for seven names of Yama.

* 'Chaturthah', for worship of Uma with lamps, eatables on fourth day of bright fortnight of 'Magha'.

* 'Phalguni', from full moon day of 'Phalgun' to fifth day of dark fortnight of 'Chaitra'. Sun and Moon are worshipped by listening to music, concerts and dramatic performances, etc.

* 'Rohina Samyoga', for worship of Kashyapa, the founder of Kashmir and their cows and calves on a day in 'Shravana' conjoined with Rohini constellation.

* 'Shradha Paksha'. Though performance of 'shradaha' would be compulsory on the 15th day and for other days it would be optional. However, for those killed by weapons it was to be performed on the 14th day of 'paksha'.

* 'Mahanaumi', for worship of weapons to be performed in Durga temple.

Serpents had a prominent place in religious pantheons of ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Chinese, Japanese etc. Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hian, and Hiaun Tsang refer to Nagas many times. Abul Fazal in his Aina-e-Akbari informs that in his time (1556-1605) there were 700 places sacred to Serpents in Kashmir.

Nilmata describes Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu and prescribes celebration of his birthday.

Though Goddess of learning is Saraswati but 'Sharda' was known as the Goddess of learning in Kashmir. In Rajataringini the temple of Sharda has been shown on a small hill above the junction of Kishan Ganga with a small stream called Madhumati. This has been traced by Stein in 1892. It appears to be same as the temple of Durga erected by Shandilya on the bank of Madhumati as mentioned in the Nilamata Purana.

About sixty rivers have been mentioned in Nilmata. It also deals with the geography of the world as other Puranas do.

Though Rajatarangini deals with kings and queens of Kashmir, Nilmata gives some expressions regarding political thought and organization viz. sovereignty, Territory, ministry, treasury, ally, foe, army etc. Child kings were not invited to participate in wars and an enemy who would be afraid or run away from the war field, would not be killed.

CHAPTER - IX

"INDIAN PHILOSOPHY"

"Brahmany adhaya karmani,
Sangam tyaktva karotiyah;
Lipyate na sa papena,
Padma-patram ivambhasa."

..... (Gita, V-10)

(He who acts offering all actions to God and shaking off attachment remains untouched by sin as the lotus leaf by water.)

Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan had a deep study of Hinduism. Upnishads, Bhagwad Gita, commentaries of Brahma Sutras by Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhava, Nimbaika and others, Buddhist and Jain scriptures all broadened his thought. The study of Plato, Plotinius, Kant, Bradley Bergson, Whitehead and other famous philosophers also influenced him quite a bit. According to him philosophical trends against religion can be classified into Naturalistic Atheism, Agnosticism, Skepticism, Humanism and Authortanism. He maintains that logical agreements against religion are misconceived. Logical knowledge is a non-knowledge (Avidhya) valid only till intuition arises. Intuition arises when the shell of our egoistic existence breaks and our primoral spirit comes back to us. With this our senses and intellect are

derived. Whereas intellect reveals knowledge of reality, intuition reveals the truth of it. Among the intuitions religious intuition is of the highest type.

It is said that the spiritual experiences of Socrates, Plotinius, Augustine, Dante, Bunyan, Underhill etc. besides a number of Hindu thinkers have experienced the reality of God in their ecstasy. The descent of God on Earth again and again, what is termed as the conception of 'Avatara' is meant to purify the cosmos from the Evil.

According to Radhakrishnan, rebirths are essential for realization of distant goal i.e. salvation. It cannot be achieved in one life. A continuous pursuit from birth to birth alone can make self-realization possible. The life span of a man is short to achieve self-realization for union with God and therefore, a number of rebirths are essential.

Mahatma Gandhi, on the other hand, was a karma yogi, for whom a small bit of moral action is equivalent to thousands of mystic thoughts and spiritual discourses. He always used to consult Bhagwad Gita for his day to day problems as he would draw solace and peace from the holy Gita. The writings of Leo Tolstoy affected him the most in the realm of thought, action and philosophy of non-violence. He was a great Vedantist and preached non-violence, non-cooperation, dignity of labour, return to homeland. He was against Industrialized Civilization. He was not prepared to hold any religion perfect. He held that though Islam is a religion of peace, yet muslims

frequently take to the war. As regards the existence of God, he would say that cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments, authoritarian and historian testimony, personal direct experience, belief of the majority and similar other reasons are a pragmatic proof of the existence of God. For him Shri Rama was not the historical Ram, but the Eternal, Unborn, the One without a second to whom he would worship.

Man must suffer for his sins, immoral actions, crimes, treachery and other wrongs. It is these that bring wars and disasters. Virtuous acts, on the other hand, bring happiness. Gandhi, whose mind was influenced a lot by Upnishads and other scriptures declared that God is truth and love. He is ethics and morality. He is fearless and a source of life and light, yet beyond and above these. He is conscience and transcends speech and reason. He is a personal God to those who need His touch.

Gandhi would say that 'Ahimsa' is non-injury or non-violence in thought, speech and action. Ahimsa is manifested in love, social service, renunciation and fearlessness. It is not merely non-killing. According to him killing becomes duty at times and that is why he did not accept Jain concept of non-killing. He would not agree with those who would say that truth and non-violence have no place in politics. He would, on the other hand, advocate its practice in day to day conduct of laws of the state, politics and personal matters. He used to pray daily and would say that prayer is the yearning of soul to merge in the divine essence. It is the nucleus of all religions. Prayer according to him were the savings of his life. Without it, he should have been a lunatic long ago as

he had his share of bitterest experience in his public and private life. These experiences would throw him in despair but only prayers enabled him to get over them.

Sri Aurobindo conceived world to be real and not an illusion. According to him, salvation is not freedom from rebirth or cessation of worldly existence. It is the transmutation of man into God. Existence manifests itself in the form of being and becoming. The Absolute is bliss. It is joy and delight. According to Upnishads, "From bliss indeed all these beings originate, having been born they are sustained by bliss and they move towards and merge in bliss." The evolution of an individual takes place from birth to birth. There is no fall, no regression, no backward movement but constant ascent in rebirth. The regression of man into animal life in rebirth is not possible according to Sri Aurobindo, though some believe that if one does bad `karma', the regression is there.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of evolution is that :

* Evolution is a divine process of spiritual manifestation of cosmos.
* Creation and evolution differ.
* Evolution is a double process of Ascent and Descent. Life descends in matter and matter ascends to life.
* Transformation is an essential feature of evolution.
* Ways to divine evolution are mysterious.

* The purpose of evolution is divination of the individual and the universe.

* There are three stages of cosmic evolution. At the beginning are material elements viz. earth, fire and water. At the second stage is the evolution of life. Today mind is the highest emergent principle of nature, as we talk of reason, science, industry, culture, civilization etc. At the ultimate stage is the conversion of entire nature into Divine Nature or God Himself.

Swami Ramakrishna Parmahansa propounded his own philosophy of God realization. According to him,

* Realization of God is the essence of all religions. It is the aim and end of human existence.

* All religions are paths leading to God.

* It is easier to realize God through 'Bhakti' (devotion) than through 'Jnana' (knowledge). In materialistic age 'Bhakti' is the most suitable. If one surrenders oneself absolutely to God, one is blessed with 'Viveka' (discrimination), 'Vairagya' (renunciation) and 'Jnana' (knowledge).

Devotion to God must precede social service. Philanthropic work is good but it must be a part of divine service i.e. without ego or desire.

The life of Ramakrishna shows that even an illiterate man having no knowledge of Vedas or Upnishads can realize God through devotion. From a 'Bhakta'

(devotee) he can become a 'Jnani' (knower). He believed that a renunciated life is conducive to liberation as compared to a household life. He experienced oneness with the formless Brahaman in his mystic experience through methods laid down in different faiths. It is only in ignorance one sees the phenomenon and not God. But when he sees God, the universe vanishes for him.

World is the sum total of one's sensation, perception and ideas both in waking and dreaming. The 'Atman' (soul) is Brahaman and Brahaman is 'Atman'. It is one eternal infinite existence, consciousness and bliss. It is spiritual and indivisible consciousness and bliss, immortal, nameless, formless, beginningless and endless. The 'Atman' is beyond time, space and causation.

Jnanayoga is the path of self-realization through discriminative knowledge. It is a form of spiritual discipline based mainly on the philosophical discrimination between real and unreal and renunciation of unreal. The discipline of Jnanayoga is two-fold, the withdrawal of everything material or objective and meditation with devotion upon the true nature of self.

The performance of duties when unaccompanied by detachment of spirit do not lead us to salvation. The goal of 'Karmayoga' is salvation through unselfish work. The two types of 'Karmayogic' actions are 'Pravrti' and 'Nivrti'. Those which revolve round central ego and attach with it pursuits like wealth, power, fame and name are 'Pravrti'. Those which lead to detachment, self abnegation and are moral and religious are 'Nivrti'.

The path of devotion to God for salvation is called 'Bhakti'. It requires real genuine and ceaseless love of God to achieve this supreme identity with Him. A spiritual teacher or 'Guru' is necessary for showing light to the devotee. A man without a 'Guru' remains ignorant and in darkness. Swami Vivekananda went into trance by just one touch of Swami Ramakrishna who saw the Divine Mother present with him more real than anything around him. But when he would be in 'Samadhi' all disappeared but the self. According to Swami Vivekananda, Vedantic religion is the most universal religion amongst all religions. It propounds faith in Brahaman, non-dualism and unity. It can find acceptance in the intellectual masses of today.

Sant Tulsidas gives three paths of salvation (highest goal). These are action, knowledge and devotion (Karma, Jnana and Bhakti). He says there are others as well and as efficacious but he does not recommend them. According to him concentration, vow, discipline, counting of names, offerings, fasts, charities, sacrifices, penances, pilgrimages etc. are of no avail. Even study of Veda, Upnishads and Puranas, or service to anchorites, gods are of no avail because in each of them there is some sort of shortcoming. He, therefore, advises all to seek Shri Rama.

While talking to Shabri in the forests during His fourteen years exile, Shri Rama expounds nine forms of devotion :

* Faith in communion with saints.

* Love for legends regarding Shri Rama.
* Selfless devotion to the lotus feet of Guru.
* Songs of Shri Rama's praise.
* Prayers and repetition of mystic spells.
* Self governance and detachment from world.
* Seeing whole world full of Shri Rama and holding saints in yet greater account than Him.
* Contentment with what one has.
* Guileless simplicity towards all and hearty confidence in God without exaltation or defection.

Shri Rama tells people of Ayodhya, "Whether to be a man, eunuch or woman, or whether animate, if with all his soul he sincerely worships Me, he is the best beloved. Tell Me what are the difficulties in the way of faith." For it, neither abstract meditation nor sacrifice, prayer, penance nor fasting is necessary. What is essential is simplicity of character, non-crookedness and absolute contentment.

The Vedic as well as Pre-Vedic age is full of symbols which represent the forces working behind them. Thus, Surya, Vayu, Indra etc. are not celestial objects but the powers behind them. God for the Seers of the Vedic periods was not in the image of Man but rather man was conceived as an inferior image of God. The nation or a society like an individual has a body, an organic life, a moral temperament and developing mind and soul

behind all these. The ideal of this human existence and soul would lie in its progress, joy, power, love, light and beauty of the transcendental and universal spirit. The solution of all problems of social life can be met in complete spiritualization of human life. Gita preaches a three-fold integral yoga i.e. yoga of work, yoga of love and yoga of knowledge to achieve this.

The Absolute according to Puranas is Sachidananda i.e. Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. It is one in triple aspect. The Absolute is Para-Brahaman, the Indescribable, the Inconceivable. It is neither Being nor Non-being, neither 'Atman' nor 'Maya', neither Quality nor Non-quality, neither Bliss nor Non-bliss, neither 'Purusha' nor 'Prakriti', neither God nor man nor animal, neither Release nor Bondage.

The real value of philosophy for man is to give him light in the nature of his being, the principles of his psychology, his relations with the world and with God. This light one can have through Yoga - the 'Karma Yoga', 'Bhakti Yoga' and the 'Jnana Yoga'.

CHAPTER - X

"THE ARYA SAMAJ"

"Deva-dvija-guru pragya,
Pujanam saucham arjavam;
Brahma-charyam ahimsa cha,
Shariram tapa uchyate."

..... (Gita, XVII-14)

"Anudvega karam vakyam,
Satyam priya hitamcha yat;
Svadhyayabhyasanam chaiva,
Vanmayam tapa uchyate."

..... (Gita, XVII-15)

"Manah prasadah saumyatvam,
Maunam atma vinigrahah;
Bhava samshuddir ityatat,
Tapo manasam uchyate."

..... (Gita, XVII-16)

"Shraddaya paraya taptam,
Tapas tat tri vidham naraih;
Aphalakankshibhir yuktaih,
Sattvikam parichakshate."

..... (Gita, XVII-17)

(Worship of God, the Brahmins, elders and wisemen, purity, straightness, continence and harmlessness - this is called bodily penance.

Words which cause no annoyance to other and are truthful, agreeable and wholesome as well as the study of Vedas and other 'Shastras'

and practice of repetition of the Divine name - this is known as the austerity of speech.

Cheerfulness of mind, placidity, habit of contemplation on God, control of mind and perfect purity of inner feelings - all this is called austerity of the mind.

This threefold penance performed with supreme faith by yogis expecting no return is called Sattvika.)

Arya Samaj was founded by Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati on 6th April, 1875 at Bombay. He wanted to liberate man from the clutches of superstitions and therefore, declared that he believed in a religion based on universal and all embracing principles which have been held as true by mankind. Arya in its original Sanskrit sense has been used for a good, brave and honest man irrespective of caste, colour, creed or nationality. A comparative study of Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam proves that every founder of a new religion was only a reformer of some old religion.

Till a few decades ago, Americans used to call everyone in India, a Hindu. Even Sir Syed Ahmed Khan claimed himself to be a Hindu because he considered all those living in India as Hindus.

A few incidents in Dayanand's early life gave a turn to his future. Some of these are:

An orthodox priest who must not have been well versed in spiritual lore had told him that Lord Shiva comes on Shivaratri night to the place where puja is held. To his

dismay, he found only mice playing around the idol of Shiva where puja was offered inspite of his night long vigil.

The death of his sister whom he loved a lot. The death of his uncle to whom he was greatly attached. Getting disgusted with all that had happened, he left home as a boy and roamed all over the country, more in the Himalayas, in search of a Guru so that he could search God. He thus, showed his wonderful resolve. After a lot of search he was brought back by his father. His father wanted to marry him but he reescaped and this time came across Swami Virjanand of Mathura who was a legendary Sanskrit scholar. He took a vow from Mool Ji, as Dayanand was called then, that he would spread true religion of Vedas as would be taught by the Guru and remove false beliefs and superstitions for the rest of his life. He later became a preacher of Vedas, an orator in Sanskrit and Hindi of the highest calibre and a prolific writer. He wrote some 25 books in the last 15 years of his life besides his commentary on Vedas and the famous "Satyarth Prakash".

Dayanand had reprimanded Maharaja of Jodhpur for his having a lot of infatuation for a dancing girl. She bribed a cook and got poison served to Dayanand. The poison later had its effect and he died but before that he showed generosity for the cook and got him released.

At the time of his reescape he was 21 years old. He spent 20 years thereafter in the Himalayas and other holy places, meeting yogis and other learned people. He had some ten years before his death during which he accomplished the task set before himself.

Dayanand criticized some old scholars like Sayan, Mahindhar, Ubhat, as they had preached some inhuman practices i.e. animal sacrifice, sati, etc. He had the courage to challenge the authority and monopoly of a priest to be so merely by right of birth. He said that even Shudras could become priests and perform Yajnas by studying Vedas, from which they were debarred by priests. He considered the then Hinduism as corrupt Vedic religion. He advocated defiance on restriction to travel abroad, widow marriage, inter-dining and intercaste marriage.

According to Dr. Radhakrishnan Hindu had originally a territorial and not a credal significance. It implied residence in a well defined geographical area. However, Mahatma Gandhi would say that Hinduism as a religion is the religion of Sanatani Hindus who believe in Vedas, Upnishads, Puranas and other Hindu scriptures.

New religion can be traced to its immediate predecessor. A close connection between Judaism, Christianity and Islam is acknowledged by its followers. Islam accepts Abraham, Moses and Jesus as its prophets also but insist that Mohammad was the last and final. Dr. Sail's famous translation of the Holy Koran indicates that Prophet Mohammad borrowed from Judaism many of his doctrines. Christianity is also based on Judaism. It is believed to be an advancement to the religion of antiquity and based on Buddhism, as preached in Palestine at the time Jesus was born. St. Augustine has said, "What is now called Christian religion existed among the ancients but was abstract until Christ came." Parsi religion bears a remarkable similarity in its doctrines

and even in its language with the Vedas. They call themselves Aryans and consider that Zoroastria like Buddha was an Aryan reformer. Vedas are considered the fountainhead of all religions. The Koran and Bible lead us to Zend Avesta and the latter onto Vedas. Thence we proceed no further.

Guru Granth Sahib consists of the work of 36 writers including Kabir, Jaideo, Surdas, Ramanand and other saints. Seventy three percent of it authors are Hindus by faith and birth. Granth Sahib was first compiled by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjun Dev. Main body of the Granth Sahib is in pure Hindi or its distorted /corrupt form and not in Gurumukhi. The figures of speech and parables have been taken from the Upnishads and Vedas. The names of Gods are mostly Hindu though words 'Allah' and 'Khudda' are occasionally used. Even Guru Govind Singh's couplet in the Granth Sahib is an eye-opener for the Sikh fundamentalists of today.

"Sakaljagat mein Khalsa Pantha Gaja,
Jage Dharma Hindu Sakal Bhund."

It means let Khalsa Panth resound in the world so that Hindu Dharma is revived and all falsehood is destroyed.

Dayanand's philosophy is the philosophy of Vedic religion. He founded Arya Samaj with the following ten points philosophy :

1. Belief in God :

God is primary source of all true knowledge and all that is known by its means.

2. Concept of God, His powers and functions :

God is existent Conscience, all Beatitude, Formless, Almighty, Just, Merciful, Unbegotton, Infinite, Unchallengeable, Beginningless, Incomparable, Supporter of all, Lord of all, All Pervading, Omniscient. (As such all idols, pictures or any other likeness is considered highly objectionable).

3. Vedas as scriptures :

It is a paramount duty of all Arya Samajis to read Vedas, preach Vedas, recite, hear and teach Vedas. Vedas are a divine knowledge. No floral offerings are to be made to Vedas as is done by Sikhs to Guru Granth Sahib.

4. Accept Truth :

We should always be ready to accept truth and discard the untruth.

5. Dharma :

All our actions should be in accordance with what we consider truth. That is our 'Dharma' (religious duty).

6. Do good :

We must do good to one and all, in fact, do universal good.

7. Code of Individual Conduct :

Love and affection should be the basis of all behaviour and dealings with others.

8. Dissemination of Knowledge :

The duty of Arya Samajis is to disseminate knowledge and removal of their ignorance.

9. Socialism :

One should not remain content in one's own progress but should consider progress of all one's own.

10. Working of Modern Democracy :

While we are free in our individual matters, we cannot claim personal liberty in matters concerning the welfare of the society as whole.

Swami Dayananda not only rendered social work to people in times of calamity but tried to better the education facilities by setting up D.A.V. institutions in the country which enjoy good reputation of people to this date.

CHAPTER - XI

"BRAHMO SAMAJ MOVEMENT"

"Uddhared atmanatmanam,
Natmanam vasadayet;
Atmaiva hyatmano bandhur,
Atmaiva ripur atmanah."

..... (Gita, VI-5)

(One should lift oneself by one's own efforts and should not degrade oneself for one's own self is one's friend and one's own self is one's enemy.)

Ram Mohan Roy was born to Ramakanta and Tarini Devi (known as Phool-Thakurani) in 1774 A.D. Ramakant's grandfather Sh. Krishna Chander Banerjee came from a Brahmin family in Murshidabad district in Bengal. He was given the title of Roy for his services to the Govt., which was made hereditary later on. Ramakant's father Braja Binode served under Siraj -ud-doula.

Ram Mohan learnt Bengali, Persian, Arabic besides English. He studied Vedanta and Yoga at Kashi where he stayed upto the age of 16 years. He became a strong opponent of idol worship and wrote a small book which offended his father who was a bigoted Hindu. For such differences he left his house and went to propagate his thoughts. Later a reconciliation took place between

the son and the father and he returned home where his father got him married.

When Ram Mohan's brother died, his sister-in-law burnt herself on the funeral pyre. This had a deep effect on him and he started talking vehemently against Sati in addition to idol worship.

He was the Dewan of Rangpur for ten years and was given the title of Raja by the Emperor of Delhi. Thus, he came to be known as Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

He came to Calcutta to settle down when he was 40 years old. He lived at Upper Circular Road and translated Vedas and Upnishads in English and Bengali.

He was a firm believer in one God and looked on Him as the Supreme Ruler of all things and objects. He was a social reformer and fought against Sati rites, polygamy and advocated widow marriage and women's education.

It is difficult to determine how and when the practice of Sati originated. Herodotus, the great father of History, says that some such customs were in vogue among Crestorians but he is silent if any such custom prevailed amongst Indians. It seems that this practice came to India after Herodotus. The practice did not exist in the Vedic times. It was, however, in vogue at the time of invasion of Alexander the Great. Even Manu has said, "Let the widow continue till death forgiving all injuries, performing harsh duties, avoiding sensual pleasures and practising rules of virtue." However, Angira and someRishis have said that the woman who performs sati is exalted in Heavens.

Ram Mohan had not only a great passion for liberty but he was thorough about Hindu law. He gave evidence in the House of Commons Select Committee which was of importance and great value. By quoting 'Shastras' he showed that mother was entitled to a share, equal to the son, to the property left by her husband and the daughter, to one-fourth.

He established Brahmo Samaj in 1828 and opened a place of public worship in Lower Chitpur Road. It was duly consecrated as Adi Brahmo Samaj on 23-01-1830. It was a cosmopolitan house of prayer. He sailed for England on 15-11-1830, and after a torturous journey, reached Liverpool in April, 1932. In London he had the twin job of presenting a petition in the matter regarding abolition of Sati and on Revenue & Judicial System of India. He gave an excellent presentation.

After a brief visit to France, he returned to England. He fell down with fever and died in September and was buried in October, 1832. Later his remains were removed to the Cemetery of Arno's Vale near Bristol on 29-5-1843 where a tomb was erected by his friend Dwarkanath Tagore. He was buried due to customs of the Land.

Dwarkanath Tagore born 1817, died January, 1905 at the age of 88; Keshav Chandra Sen born 19-9-1838, died 18-1-1884 at the age of 46; Pratap Chandra Majumdar born 1840, died 1905 at the age of 65; Sasipada Banerjee born 1840, died 1925 at the age of 85; Ananda Mohan Bose born 1846, died 1906 at the age of 60 years; Shivnath Shastri born 1847, died 1928 at the age of 81, were other noteworthy people who managed Brahmo Samaj and did a lot of work for social reforms in Hindus.

CHAPTER - XII

"THE RELIGIONS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD"

> **"Ishvarah sarva bhutanam,**
> **Hrdyeshe Arjuna tishthati;**
> **Bhramayan sarva bhutani,**
> **Yantrarudani mayaya."**
>
> **..... (Gita, XVIII-61)**

(Arjuna, God abides in the heart of all creatures causing them to revolve according to their Karma by His illusive power seated as these things are in the vehicle of the body.)

ANCIENT EGYPTIANS

Herodotus speaks of eight Gods of the first order, twelve Gods of the second order and leaves remaining Gods to the third order. Eight Gods of the first order are Phthah, Ra, Shu, Seb, Osiris, Isis, Set and Horus. According to later researches these are Memphis, Phthah, Shu, Tefnu, Seb, Nu, Osiris, Isis and Athor. The twelve Gods of the second order are indeterminate as various authors have put conflicting names.

The Gods were the chief objects of worship either in main centres of population or throughout the Country. To this class belong Ammon, Khem, Kneph, Phthah, Ra, Osiris and Neith. Ammon was the chief God of Thebes,

Khem of Chemmis, Ra of Heliopolis, Osiris of Abydos and Philic and Neith of Sars.

Ammon etymologically meant the Concealed God. At an early date this God was conjoined with Ra, the Sun God. The two together meant the Lord of existences and Supporter of all things e.g. life and light.

Other deities of some importance in the religious system were :

* Mant, the consort of Ammon who represented Nature.
* Sati, the consort of Kneph.
* Sakhet, the consort of Phthah.
* Set, the Egyptian Saturn.
* Hanker, the Egyptian Mars.
* Anuka, the War Goddess.
* Nebta, sister of Osiris.
* Nut, Goddess of Firmament.
* Ma, Goddess of Truth.

Belief in future life was the main principle of Egyptian religion. It was thought that soul of a person descended into a lower world (Amenti) after his death and was conducted to the Hall of Truth where it was judged in the presence of Osiris. If good deeds weighed more than a particular set value, he would be allowed to enter the boat of Sun and conducted by good priests to Pools of Peace, otherwise he was sentenced according to

the insufficiency of good deeds. Those, with good deeds, would return after 3000 years of stay with osiris, and enter their bodies. That is why the dead bodies were embalmed for preservation so that these do not perish before this period.

ASSYRIANS AND BABYLONIANS

Assyrian and Babylonian polytheism differed from Egyptian by being less multitudinous. Though inscriptions speak of about 4000 odd Gods but practically not more than 200 deities obtain frequent mention.

"Assur" rules supreme over all Gods, the highest object of worship in Assyrian. It is Il or Ra in Babylonians.

"Bel" is the God of Lords, the mighty prince. In their history of creation, it is said that Bel made the Earth and the Heavens. He formed man out of a mixture of his blood with earth. He also formed beast. He created Sun, Moon and Stars. The chief Seat of Bel in Babylonia was Nipur now Niffer and in Assyria Calah, now Nimrud. Hoa ranks immediately after Bel. He determines destinies.

Sin, the moon is one of the leading deities. It is united with Shamas, the place of Vul being taken by Goddess who is titled "the divine mistress of the world." It is widely worshipped both in Assyria as well as Babylonia. Shamas, the Sun God is placed next to Sin probably because night, when Sin could be seen, was more agreeable to the inhabitants of these hot regions.

It and Assur were exempted, by their general rule, for having a wife. Remaining Gods were assigned a wife. Bilat is the wife of Bel, Derkina is the wife of Hoa, Shala or Tala is the wife of Vul and Anunit is the wife of Shamas. No proper name is given to the wife of Sin.

Other Gods were Vin or Bar, Merodach or Marduk, Nergal, Ishtan and Nebo. These correspond to various planets.

EARLY SANSKRITIC INDIANS

Like Egyptians, Assyrians and Babylonians the religion of early Indians was extensive polytheism. At first the Vedic Rishis found no more than 33 Gods, but in due course of time it swelled to 3339 (Rigveda Samhita). There was no comparison of one God with another and no conflict of opinion. The Vedic worshipper would at any time concentrate only on one God as if it were the sole God whom he recognized.

Agni was associated with fire; Dyaus, with the Heavens; Surya or Savitri, with the Sun; Soma, with the Moon; Usha, with the Dawn; Prithvi, with the Earth; Vayu, with the Winds; Ap, with the Waters; Nadi with the Rivers; Maruts with the Storms, etc.

It was believed procreation was originated by Brahma who formed a female from half of his body.

Vedic poets aspired for immortality. According to Max Mueller's translation of Vedas, the following verses need mention :

"Where the Sun is placed,
in that immortal imperishable world
place me 'O' Soma.

Where King Vaivaswata reigns,
where the sacred place of Heaven is;
Where the mighty waters are,
there make me immortal.

Where life is free,
in the third heaven of Heavens;
Where the worlds are radiant,
there make me immortal.

Where the wishes and desire are,
where the place of bright Sun is;
Where there is freedom and delight,
there make me immortal.

Where there is happiness and delight,
where joy and pleasure reside;
Where the desires of our heart are attained,
there make me immortal."

GREEKS

Greek religion generally is described as Worship of Nature. Most deities correspond to certain parts of sensible world or certain classes of objects. There is, however, a marked gradation of ranks and power among God.

There are twelve Olympic deities, six male and six female, but not as rule connected together in pairs. Zen, Poseidon, Apollo, Ares, Hepheastus, Hermes, Hera, Athens, Artimis, Aphrodite, Hestia and Demeter. Next in rank are Hades, Diorysus, Cronus, Uranus,

Hyperione, Helio, Nerens, Protens, Hermonia, Graces, Muses, Fates, Oceanids, Nymphs, Naiads etc.

In the third rank are placed the attendants of greater Gods viz. Iris, Hebs, Kratos, Bra etc.

In the fourth rank are Night, Day, Ether, Dawn, Darkness, Death, Sleep, Style, Memory, Fame, Retribution, Recklessness etc.

Other old religions pertain to Romans, Iranians, Phoenicians and Etruscans.

CHAPTER - XIII

"THE EXPERIENCES OF FIRST VISION"

"Sreyan dravyamayad yagyaj,
Gyanayagyah paramtapa;
Sarvam karma khilam Partha,
Gyane parisamapyate."

..... (Gita, IV-33)

(Arjuna, sacrifice through knowledge is superior to sacrifice performed by material things. For all actions without exception culminate in knowledge, O son of Kunti.)

"Tad viddhi pranipatena,
Pariprashnena sevya;
Updekshyanti te gyanam,
Gyaninas tattvadarshinah."

..... (Gita, IV-34)

(Understand the true nature of that knowledge by approaching illumined soul. If you prostrate at their feet, render them service and question them with an open and guileless heart, those wise Seers of Truth will instruct you in that knowledge.)

The experiences of first vision by Swami Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Chaitanya Ramakrishna, Sir Francis Younghusband and Swami Yogananda are given below :

SWAMI RAMAKRISHNA

Ramakrishna was born in a poor Hindu family of Kamarpuker in Bengal. His Guru's name was Totapuri. He had no formal schooling as such but he learnt Puranic recitals and folk songs. At the age of 16, he went to Calcutta to help his brother and was engaged as a family priest for three years. Then he was appointed as a priest in one of the temples at Dakshineshwar which were built by Rani Rasmani in 1855. He spent the next twelve years in search of God, with astonishing tenacity of purpose. He did not close his eyes for half of his sleep. He would meditate under an Amalka tree in Panchvati garden without clothes or sacred thread. He says :

"I was then suffering from excruciating pain for not being blessed with the vision of the Mother. I felt someone was squeezing my heart like a wet towel. I was overpowered with great restlessness, afraid that it may not be my lot to realize Her in this life. I could not bear the separation any longer and thought that I had no more need to live. Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that was in the Mother's temple. Determined to put an end to my life, I jumped like a mad man and seized the sword when, all of a sudden, the buildings with their various parts, the temple and all vanished from my sight leaving no trace whatsoever and in their stead, I found a limitless, infinite, effulgent ocean of consciousness or spirit and as far as the eye could reach its shining billows were madly rushing towards me from all sides with a terrific noise to swallow me up. In the twinkling of an eye, they were all on me and engulfed me completely. I was panting for breath and

caught in the rolling waves and fell down unconscious. What happend outside after that I do not know nor how the day or the next passed. But within me there was undiluted bliss altogether new and I felt the direct presence of the Divine Mother."

Totapuri introduced him to Vedanta. On the first day of his getting lessons of Advaita philosophy he went into Advaita Sadhana and got into Nirvikalpa Samadhi and remained in that state for three days. Totapuri has remarked that what he himself did not get for 40 years, Ramakrishna got in one day of the lesson.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Swami Vivekananda came to Swami Ramakrishna in 1879 and till the latter went into Mahasamadhi 1n 1886 (i.e. seven years period) he talked incessantly and poured out treasures of his heart. When Swami Ramakrishna touched Swami Vivekananda for the first time, the effect as told by Swami Vivekananda himself is described as:

"The touch at once gave rise to a novel experience within me. With my eyes open, I saw that the walls and everything in the room whirled rapidly and vanished into naught and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in all encompassing mysterious void. I was terribly frightened and thought I was facing death. Unable to control myself I cried out, "What is this you are doing to me? I have my parents at home." He laughed at this and gently pressing his hand over my chest said, "All right, let you rest now. Everything

will come in time." I was myslf again and found everything within me and without, the room etc. as it was seen before."

CHAITANYA

Chaitanya was born in 1486 at Navadvipa or Nadia in West Bengal. His original name was Nimai. He later called himself Vishwambhar. He became a monk at the age of 24 years and took the name of Chaitanya Sri Krishna (He who awakes Sri Krishna in the heart of all). It is said that he went into ecstatic state a number of times and appeared as four-armed Vishnu to some of his associates. He became a 'Sanyasin' in 1520 and put red robes and was given the name Chaitanya by Keshav Bharti. Though his mother lamented at the time of his departure, he told her in a choked voice, "You were my mother in all my incarnations. When you were Prisni I was born as your son, then you were successively born as Aditi, Devhuti, Kaushalya and Devaki and I was born as your son Vamana, Kapila, Ramchandra and Krishna. I promise I shall be born as your son in two more births. So please do not grieve for me." After taking up monastic life he left for Puri.

On reaching the temple of Lord Jagannatha, he straightaway rushed to embrace the image of the Lord. Before he could do so he fell into a trance. As the guards of the temple advanced to lift him and take him outside, as no one is allowed to embrace the Lord, Vasudeva Sarvabhauma stopped them. He gave a gaze at the beaming face of young Chaitanya and an upsurge of love overpowered him. He waited for long even till the hour

of 'bhoga' arrived, yet Chaitanya continued in his trance. His worry was off when he found that Chaitanya was breathing. It reminded him of 'Sattvika' form of passion for Krishna. It is called 'Sudipta Sattvika' (radiant pure) and is displayed only by a devotee who has attained 'Nitya Sidhi' (perpetual realization). This ecstasy is possible only in one who has attained the highest bliss. It is surprising to see these manifestations in a human body.

Though he had gone into an ecstatic form early but this time he got absorbed in Krishna for a very long duration which Sarvabhauma, a guru of 'Advaita Vedanta', discovered later. In fact he felt that Chaitanya was none else but Krishna himself.

Chaitanya went into 'mahasamadhi' in 1553, at the age of 48 years.

SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND

Younghusband was an officer of British Government and was responsible for political negotiation with the Government of Tibet in early years of the 20th century. He was also appointed as Resident of the British Government in Kashmir. He says that the greatest experience of his life was the spiritual experience he had on the mountain side on the day he was supposed to leave Lhasa after negotiating a treaty of Commerce and Interrelation which was achieved after long and tough discussions. He says,

"When I reached the camp that afternoon I went alone to the mountainside and there gave myself up to

all the emotions of this eventful time. At last I could relax. I could just rest and be thankful and nature was in tune with my feeling. The unclouded sky was the clearest Tibetan blue. The mountains bathed the purplish haze. In mystery the sacred city was once more wrapped. But now I had, no longer, any cause to dread the hatred it might hide. From it came only the echo of Lamas farewell message. He bade me to think of peace and peace only could I think (Lama had given him a statue of Buddha and when they give it to anyone they say think of peace only).

I was happy with my achievement. But now there grew up in me something infinitely greater than mere elation and good will. Elation grew to exaltation and exultation to exultation which thrilled through me with overpowering intensity. I was besides myself with untellable joy. The whole world was ablaze with the same ineffable bliss that was burning within me. I felt in touch with the flaming heart of the world. What was glowing in all creation and in every human being was a joy far beyond, as far beyond mere goodness as glory of the Sun is beyond the glow of a candle. A mighty joy giving power was at work in the world and at work in all about me and at work in every living thing. So, it was revealed. Never again could I think of evil. Never again could I have enmity. Joy had begotten love and I was boiling over with love for the whole world. I could embrace every single human being. Each was divine. Henceforth for me life was nothing but buoyancy and light. For one precious moment I had tasted that to which Jesus referred when He said, "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full. "

Francis Younghusband had another experience in October, 1925. He says,

"I lay in bed, I had a strong premonition that power of the Spirit would come on me again. This time I feared that I was not strong enough to bear it (I was 62 years). I feared it would overpower me and I meant to fight it to hold my own and keep myself and be myself. I wanted to keep my intellect clear so that I could think and not be swept away. I collected all my strength and all my presence of mind to resist the onrush when it should come. In the middle of night at about 3 a.m I woke up and immediately knew that the power is coming. I made one desperate attempt to resist and then it was on me. I felt it in my legs first. They were convulsed and shook violently. Then it came over me till I was filled with it. And now I gave great puffs as it were to blow the spirit out of me before it would overwhelm me. But I was filled and filled with it and could no more fight with it. It took absolute possession of me and just settled down and lay there. Then a wonderful peace descended on me, most beautiful and sweet and with a feeling of great thankfulness I kept murmuring to myself, "I thank thee, O God, I thank thee."

SWAMI YOGANANDA

Mukunda Lal Ghosh was born in Gorakhpur on 5.1.1893. He took the name Yogananda in 1915 when he entered the ancient monastic order. In 1935 his Guru, Swami Yukteshwar bestowed on him the religious title of Paramhansa. He entered 'mahasamadhi' in Los

Angeles, California, U.S.A. on 7.3.1952 after concluding his speech at a banquet held in honour of H.E. Binay R. Sen, the Ambassador of India in the U.S.A. His physical appearance on 27.3.1952 (i.e. twenty days after his death) just before the bronze cover of the casket was put into position, was the same as on 7.3.1952. He looked as fresh and unravaged by decay as he looked on the night of his death. There was no physical disintegration of his body.

On many occasions he had Goddess Kali's 'darshan'. He once told his Guru that he wanted to go to Himalayas to achieve continuous divine communion. The Guru told him that wisdom is better sought from a man of realization than from inert mountains.

Once sitting with his Guru after immediate return from Ranjabpur near Tarakewer where he had gone to meet Swami Ram Gopal Majumdar (called sleepless saint), another disciple of Lahiri Mahshaya. He point blank told him, "Young Yogi, I see you are running away from your Master. He is everything you need. You should return to him. Mountains cannot be your Guru." His Guru told him, "Poor boy, mountains could not give you what you want. Your heart's desire shall be fulfilled." While saying so, the Guru gently struck his chest over the heart and what happened with this is said by Yogananda as under :

"My body became immovably rooted, breath was drawn out of my lungs as if by some huge magnet. Soul and mind instantly lost their physical bondage and streamed out like a fluid, piercing light from every pore. The flesh was though dead, yet in my intense awareness

I knew that never before had I been fully alive. My sense of identity was no longer narrowly confined to a body by embraced circumoumbient atoms. People in distant streets seemed to be moving gently over my remote periphery. The roots of plants and trees appeared as through a dim transparency of the soil. The whole vicinity lay before me. My ordinary frontal vision was now changed to a vast spherical sight all perceptive. Through the back of my head, I saw men strolling. All objects in my panoramic gaze trembled and vibrated like quick motion picture. All this melted into a luminescent sea. An oceanic joy broke upon my calm endless shores of my soul. The Spirit of God, I realized is exhaustless bliss. His body is countless tissues of light. A swelling glory within me began to envelope towns, continents, earth, solar and stellar systems. Again and again I saw creative beams condense into constellations, then resolve into sheets of transparent flame. Blissful 'Amrita', the nectar of immortality, pulsating through me with quick silver like fluidity. The creative voice of God I heard resounding as 'AUM', the vibration of the cosmic motor.

Suddenly breath returned to my lungs with an unbearable disappointment. I realized that my infinite immensity was lost. Once more, I was limited to the humiliating cage."

He prostrated before the Guru who was standing besides him. He was held by the Guru who said, "You must not get over-drunk with ecstasy. Much work remains for you in this world."

Once, after this event he told his Guru, "I want to know when shall I find God." The Guru told him that he had seen Him already. He nodded at this and said, "No." The Guru told him, "I am sure you are not expecting a venerable personage adorning a throne in some corner of the cosmos, I see, however, that you are imagining that possession of miraculous power is the proof that one has found God. `No'. One might gain the power to control the whole universe yet find the Lord illusive still. Every new joy is God. He is inexhaustible. As you continue meditation during the years, He will guide you with an infinite ingenuity. Devotees like yourself who have found way to God, never dream of exchanging Him for any other happiness."

CHAPTER - XIV

"USEFUL SAYINGS AND INSTRUCTIVE EVENTS IN INDIAN LIFE"

"Manmana bhava mad bhakto,
Madhyaji mam namaskuru;.
Mam evaishyasi satyam te,
Pratijane priyo asi me."

..... (Gita, XVIII-65)

(Give your mind to Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me and bow to Me. Doing so you will come to Me alone, I truly promise you, for you are exceptionally dear to Me.)

1. The sacrifice of muttering 'AUM' and the rest is better by ten-fold than a regular sacrifice. If inaudible it is hundred-fold and if mental it is one thousand-fold better.

..... **(Manava Dharma Shastra)**

2. 'AUM' is the supreme Brahaman, suppression of breath, the highest austerity but there is nothing more exalted than 'Gayatri Mantra'. The 'mantra' teaches us to meditate on the luminous presence of the Creator of the Universe so that He might prompt our mind according to His own creative will. It is a prayer in which the worshipper prays for the light of 'Jnana' (knowledge) not for himself

but for all. The deity is the mystical Sun i.e. Savitri, the light of all lights symbolizing the highest Brahaman. Gayatri Mantra is in the third mandala of Rig Veda authored by Rishi Vishwamitra. Sun is called Savitri before its rising and this creates a glorious brightness in the eastern sky. It is believed that the original 'mantra' is from Rig Veda but 'Aum Bhur Bhurva Swaha' has been added to it later from Yajur Veda.

..... ("Renascent Hinduism" by D.S. Sarma and "Hymns from Vedas" by A.C. Bose)

3. Bhakti Yoga is the path of systematized devotion for attainment of union with God. It requires real, genuine and ceaseless love of God to achieve this supreme identity. To achieve 'Bhakti' (devotion) 'Viveka' in food (purity in food), 'Vimoha' (freedom from desires), 'Abhyasa' (performance of religious practice), 'Kriya' (doing good to others), 'Kalpana' (truthfulness in thought, speech and behaviour) and 'Ananda' (cheerfulness) are required.

..... (Rama Shankar Srivastava in "Contemporary Indian Philosophy")

4. A spiritual teacher or Guru is necessary for showing light to a devotee. A man without a Guru remains in darkness and ignorance.

..... (Rama Shankar Srivastava in "Contemporary Indian Philosophy")

5. Swami Vivekananda conceives that Vedantic religion is the most universal religion among all religions. It propounds faith in Brahaman, non-dualism and unity. It is the only religion that can find acceptance in the intellectual masses of today.

..... (**Rama Shankar Srivastava in "Contemporary Indian Philosophy"**)

6. In whatever form you worship God, you may eventually attain, Bhakti. Swami Ramakrishna worshipped Kali till he was blessed with Bhakti. The Arya Rishis of old had thoroughly realized God in Nature. Srimad Bhagvata mentions, "Bow to the sky, to air, to fire, to water, to the Earth, to the luminaries in the sky, to all created beings, to the four quarters of the globe and to the trees, rivers, seas considering them as an embodiment of God.

..... (**"Bhakti Yoga" by Ashwini Kumar Dutta**)

7. The parts of the day best suited for 'Japa' are 'Brahma Muharat' (an hour preceding day break), nightfall and midnight.

..... (**"Bhakti Yoga" by Ashwini Kumar Dutta**)

8. The best places for 'Japa' are : some place of pious memory, side of a river, top of a hill, place of pilgrimage, confluence of rivers, sacred forest, lonely garden, a shrine, beach of sea, one's own house, or any other place where one feels at ease.

..... (**"Bhakti Yoga" by Ashwini Kumar Dutta**)

9. We are always anxious to make a display of our piety. This diminishes the real religious feeling, if any, within you and perverts the mind. Conceal within your soul, the nectar of God's love. Never try to pose as a pious man. The devotee will be known by his eyes and not by his dress and talk. A story in this connection goes thus :

Hindu Princess was a pious lady, worshipping Shri Rama. She many times requested the Prince to utter the name of Rama. He did not oblige her even once. Once the Prince was away from early morning and the Princess was in ecstasy. She ordered her staff for festivities in the Palace and lunch for a thousand Brahmins. While the festivities and the lunch were in progress, the Prince came and asked for the reason of the celebrations. He was informed by the Palace staff that the Princess had ordered and she alone knew the reason. When he met the happy Princess, she told him, "Today is the greatest joy for me as you uttered the name of Rama a couple of times during sleep." The husband enquired again and she repeated the answer. He said, "Oh, the treasure so long cherished in the innermost recess of my heart has at last been opened", and with this he dropped dead on the floor. The Princess was dumbfounded as she never knew that her husband was a saint.

..... ("Bhakti Yoga" by Ashwini Kumar Dutta)

10. The obstacles in Bhakti Yoga are :

Lust, Anger, Greed, Infatuation, Vanity, Envy, Desultoriness, Worldly Anxiety, Worldly Craft, Loquacity, Disputatiousness, Pharisaical and Moral Cowardice.

..... (**"Bhakti Yoga" by Ashwini Kumar Dutta**)

11. Evil company proves to be the ruin of all virtues viz. Truth, Purity, Kindness, Intelligence, Delicacy, Prosperity, Fame, Forgiveness, Peacefulness, Self-Control, Dignity, Majesty, Distinction, Excellence, Beauty and Loveliness.

..... (**"Bhakti Yoga" by Ashwini Kumar Dutta**)

12. There is no distinction of caste or colour in the sphere of Bhakti. Shandilya says, "Even the despised castes have a right to Bhakti." Shabri was of inferior caste yet Shri Rama took the fruit tasted by her before offering the same to Him.

..... (**"Bhakti Yoga" by Ashwini Kumar Dutta**)

13. The ultimate is variously named Brahaman (the Absolute), Param Brahaman (Supreme Brahaman), Atman (Self), Parmatma (Supreme Self), Akhsaya (Imperishable), Purusha (Person), Prajapati (Lord of Creation), Vishwakarma (All Maker), Hiranya-Garbha (Cosmic Egg), Brahamanaspati (Lord of Devotion), Ishwara (God). All the terms are traceable to Vedas.

..... (**Ramdat Bhardwaj in "Philosophy of Tulsi Das"**)

14. The name of King Dashratha is familiar in Vedas (R I 219 .4). There is no doubt that the names Ikshvaku, Dashratha, Sita, Rama, Ravana and Ayodhya are available in the Vedas and those of Janaka, Ramạ, Sita in some of the Aranyakas and the Upnishads. Yet it is not certain if they really relate to the story of Ramayana.

..... **(Ramdat Bhardwaj in "Philosophy of Tulsi Das")**

15. Bhagvata enumerates twenty two incarnations of Vishnu :

* Purusha, the male Progenitor
* Varaha, the Boar
* Narada, the Great Sage
* Nara and Narayana
* Kapila, the founder of Sankhya School of Philosophy
* Dattatreya, the Sage
* Yajna, the Adorable
* Rishaba, the righteous king father of Bharata
* Prithu, a King
* Matsya, the Fish
* Kurma, the Tortoise
* Dhanvantri, the physician of God
* Narasimha, the man/lion
* Vamana, the Dwarf
* Parshurama
* Vedavyasa
* Rama
* Balarama
* Krishna
* Budha
* Kalki

Though this number swells up to 39, but usually only the following ten incarnations are recognized :

* Matsya
* Kurma
* Varaha
* Narasimha
* Vamana
* Parshurama
* Rama
* Krishna
* Budha
* Kalki

..... **(Ramdat Bhardwaj in "Philosophy of Tulsi Das")**

16. Kabir was associated both with Hinduism and Islam. He is said to have no preference for either religion but to have given teachings acceptable to the followers of both. In the legend that after his death there was a difference of opinion whether his body be cremated or buried, the matter was settled by a vision in which the spirit of Kabir instructed the disputants to lift the cloth covering the corpse. When this was done, nothing was revealed except a heap of flowers. Since these were easily separable into two, half could be dedicated to the rites of each religion.

..... **("The Manifold and the One" by Agnes Arber)**

17. By being pleasant always and smiling, it takes you nearer God, nearer than any prayer. Man who always feels miserable will never come to God. Every man has his burden to bear. If you are miserable, try to be happy, try to conquer it. Never be weak and

avoid excessive merriment because that is followed by sorrow.

..... ("Complete works of Swami Vivekananda" by Swami Madhvananda)

18. Ratnakara, a robber, with whose sin of robbing, his father, mother and wife did not agree to share his sin, came back to the sage whom he wanted to rob and learnt worship and gave up robbery. After many years of worship, a voice came, "Arise, O Sage, no more a robber, a purified sage thou art, thine old name is gone, henceforth thy name is Valmiki." One day Valmiki while taking a bath in the Ganges saw a male dove being shot and the female dove whirling round her love. He rebuked the hunter. He thought, he never used that language before. And a voice came, "Be not afraid, this is poetry. Write the life of Rama in poetry for the benefit of the world."

..... ("Complete works of Swami Vivekananda" by Swami Madhvananda)

19. A few days after Sita's union with Mother Earth, a messenger came to Rama from Gods who intimated that His mission on earth was finished and that He was to return to Heavens. He plunged into the waters of Saryu and joined Sita in the other world.

..... ("Complete works of Swami Vivekananda" by Swami Madhvananda)

20. Great sages would come to see the Pandavas when they were in exile. They would among other things tell them stories of ancient India. One pertains to Savitri who was King Ashvapati's daughter. After she Consented to

get herself married, she travelled to distant regions along with guards and aged courtiers to choose her husband. King Dyumatsena was defeated by his enemies and deprived of his kingdom. He lost his health and singht and took refuge along with his wife and son named Satyavan in the forest, where all animals moved freely as none was shot or killed. When Savitri saw Satyavan, she developed love for him at first sight. When she returned home she reported to her father that she would marry Satyavan. He consulted Narada, who was with him at that time, about this marriage. Narada told Ashvapati that this man would die within twelve months. Therefore, he persuaded his daughter to give up this choice. She never relented. They got married inspite of Narada's prediction and she went to live in the forest with her husband to serve him and his parents.

On the day, her husband was to die as per the prediction, she begged her father and mother-in-law to let her join her husband (they did not know of the prediction) to collect wood and food in the forest. As they were going, Satyavan fell down. She understood and took him in her lap and he breathed his last. With a zone of fire round her, the emissaries of death could not come within the zone. Therefore, Yama came Himself and took the soul of the dead and walked off. Savitri followed Yama. When questioned, Savitri told Yama that she is not following Him but her love. Eternal love does not separate a loving man and a faithful wife. She kept on following Yama. Getting disturbed He told her to ask for a boon and return. She at first demanded that her father-in-law may be cured of his blindness and made happy.

Yama granted the boon. Inspite of this she continued to follow Yama. She gave the same reason for her following Him and got another boon that let her father-in-law regain his wealth and lost kingdom. Though this boon was also bestowed, she however, continued to follow Yama. He wanted her to follow no more as He had already bestowed two boons. Yama told her that if her husband was a sinner, he would go to hell. Savitri told Him, "Where my love goes, I shall go there. " Yama got pleased and asked her to demand another boon. Savitri said, " Since you permit me, then let the Imperial line of my father - in- law be not destroyed, let the kingdom descent to satyavan's son. " Yama got pleased and gave her back the soul of Satyavan. He was back to life and became a prince in his kingdom.

..... ("Complete works of Swami Vivekananda" by Swami Madhvananda)

21. Chaitanya, after his stay at Puri decided on a tour to South India. Enroute at Rajamundhary on Godhavri he met Ramananda, a 'Shudra' monk, whom he embraced. He asked him to recite something from the scriptures. As he started quoting from scriptures, Chaitanya asked him to quote more as it had not touched his inner chord. He gave about twelve quotations but each time Chaitanya asked him to quote something more, till he gave a recitation regarding the glory of 'Prema' (love) with the example of love of Radha for Krishna. This touched him deeply and he said, "To attain Krishna one should adopt the attitude of a Gopi and continuously meditate on the dalliance of Radha and Krishna. One must give up the idea of magnificence of Krishna and submit like the Gopis as otherwise one can never attain

Krishna. After the conversation, Ramananda told him that when he saw him first, he thought him to be a mere Sanyasin but now feels that he is Krishna himself. Chaitanya smiled and revealed to him his true self in which were blended Krishna and Radha. Ramananda prostrated.

He went to Rameshwaram and then to Kerala and then to Gujrat. At Srirangam, he came across a Brahmin who recited Gita daily though he was ignorant of Sanskrit and did not understand the meaning of what he recited. While the Brahmin was reciting Gita within the temple precinct, Chaitanya appeared and sat to hear the recitation. When he concluded, Chaitanya told him what possible enjoyment did he derive by his recitation when he did not understand the meaning. The Brahmin replied that he was uneducated and did not understand the meaning of the words he read but he did so as his preceptor had instructed him to do. He further said that he feels immense joy and feels 'Syamala Sundar' (Krishna) seated on Arjuna's chariot, whip in hand, holding reins, and instructing Arjuna. He sees Him as long as he recites. Chaitanya embraced him saying, "You have realized the real sense of Gita. You alone are fit to read it."

..... ("Chaitanya" by A.K. Majumdar)

22. Vishwamitra and Vasishtha antagonized each other due to Trishanku a triple sinner (displeased his father as he forcibly carried a Brahmin girl, killed his preceptor's cow and ate meat). His original name was Satyavrta. Vishwamitra raised Trishanku to Heavens inspite of the resistance from Gods and opposition by Vasishtha. Another reason is the legend of Harish

Chandra, the son of Trishanku. According to Markandeya Purana, Harish Chandra, in order to fulfill a promise he gave Vishwamitra in a dream, gave up his kingdom, sold his wife and then himself. take vasishtha's Kamadenu by force. She discharged shower of fire brands from her sweat and put Vishwamitra's army in a disarray and rout. It is believed that austerity and penance alone constitute the most supreme power of the world. He took to penance and attained perfection, the Brahamanhood.

..... ("Seers of Rig Veda" by V.G. Rahurkar)

23. It is said about Kashyapa that he was the priest at the 'Ashvamedha Yagya' (Horse Sacrifice) performed by Parshurama after exterminating Kshatriya race 21 times. Kashyapa received earth as the sacrificial fee. Parshurama made Surparaka (modern Sopara in Konkana) his habitat. Kashyapa later gave the kingdom to his follower and himself retired to forest.

..... ("Seers of Rig Veda" by V.G. Rahurkar)

24. Once Vishnu was lying in his celestial abode and dreamt the three eyed Lord Shiva with radiance equipped with his 'Damru', Trishul, etc. wearing golden ornaments, dancing and happy. He woke up. Goddess Lakshmi enquired the cause. He told Her of His dream and set about to Shiva's abode along with Lakshmi. When They reached half way to Kailasha, They found Lord Shiva and Uma coming and They met. They were joyful when they beheld each other. Each gave the reason for their

Journey. Shiva, like Vishnu had dreamt of Vishnu with radiance, happy and clad with decent clothes, golden ornaments, pearls and emeralds etc. Now each began to request the other to come to His abode. While They were doing so, Narada came that way and stopped as he saw Them both. They requested him to decide where They should go first. He only sang song in their praise and did not say anything. They told Goddess Uma to decide and promised Her that They will go by Her decision. She paused and remained silent for sometime. Then She said, "o Lord ! O Keshava ! seeing Your rare, exclusive and unflinching love, one comes to the conclusion that You cannot have separate dwellings. The Kailasha is much the same as the Celestial abode and vice versa. The difference is only in the names. I feel both of You share the same soul. To me it seems that Your ladies too do not have separate individuality. Lakshmi is in no way different from what I am and I am in no way different from Lakshmi Ji. Whoever envies one of You, envies the other and whoever worships one, worships the other and whoever worships one, worships the other." with these observations of Uma they set off for their respective abodes.

..... (**"Kalyana Kalpataru - Shiva Number"**)

25. A famous king Chitravarma of Aryavrata had a beautiful modest daughter, Simantini. Her friends told her one day that an astrologer had proclaimed that she would be a widow at the age of 14 years. She was sad and took shelter with the wife of Yagnavalkya, whose name was Maitreye. She told her to observe Monday fast and chant Shiva Panchakshari (Shiv Mantra, comprising five letters). She followed Maitreye's advice. She was soon married to Chitrangada, son of King Nala's daughter.

After sometime Chitrangada went for a hunt and carried an army with him. While on a hunt, one day he went alone in a boat in Yamuna and was soon engulfed in a storm. The boat capsized and he was drowned. He could not be traced and was taken for dead. Enemies conquered his kingdom and Simantini was taken a prisoner. She, however, continued her Monday fast and the prayer.

When Chitrangada got drowned, he was taken by 'Naga Kanyas' to their king Taksha. The king knew that Chitrangada was a devotee of Shiva. Chitrangada was told by the king to ask for a boon and he said, "I am the only son of my parents and have a great desire of having a glimpse of their feet. Moreover, my wife, who is devoted to me, shall end her life. Please help me to reach them." He was granted the boon and was given powers to reach the banks of Yamuna.

On reaching the banks, he straightaway went home and looked more bright and lustrous to his parents and Simantini. By the grace of Shiva, he reconquered his kingdom and acquired his earlier prestige and glory.

Simantini understood the glory of Monday fast. This fast is considered most auspicious in 'Shravana'. To fulfill a desire, the schedule of the fast has to be kept for sixteen Mondays.

..... ("**Kalyana Kalpataru - Shiva Number**")

26. Kubera, the treasurer of Gods approached Shiva one day to seek permission to build a suitable Palace for Shiva and parvati to lives. Shiva refused flatly

as He needed none. Kubera, therefore, went to parvati. She accepted His proposal. Through Vishwakarma he built a golden Lanka. He came to Shiva and requested Him and parvati to live in it. When They went to live in this palace, They invited Ravana and a number of other Pundits for the inaugural Puja. After the puja, Shiva asked Ravana to demand his 'dakshina' for conducting the ceremony. after a lot of persuasion by Shiva to ask for something, Ravana told him, "Will You give what I ask for ? " Shiva said, "Yes." Ravana asked for the golden Lanka itself. Shiva said, "O. K." Parvati was displeased but She could not help. Shiva called Nandi and returned to Kailasha with Parvati leaving golden Lanka for Ravana.

..... ("Kalyana Kalpataru - Shiva Number")

27. Swami Yogananda's father was Bhagbati Charan Ghosh. He was in the Railways and a strict officer. One of his subordinates Abhinash Babu was a disciple of Lahiri Mahashaya, a Kriya Yogi of great repute who had an immense spiritual power. Abhinash Babu wanted to pay a visit to his master but Bhagbati Ghosh would not give him leave and criticized the former for wasting time on such things. This upset Abhinash a lot. One day, soon after the rejection of his leave, he met Bhagbati while returning home from office. Abhinash was sad and Bhagbati gave him company on foot after disembarking from his palanquin. Enroute, while Abhinash was saying in his mind, "Lahiri Mahashaya, I cannot live without seeing you", the form of the Guru appeared and said, "Bhagbati you are too hard to your employees." He vanished soon after saying this, Abhinash fell on his knees

on seeing Guru's appearance. Bhagbati told him that not only was his leave sanctioned but that he would also join him.

While accompanying Abhinash, Bhagbati took his wife and young Mukunda (later Yogananda). After having 'darshan' of Lahiri Mahashaya, he told them, "I am glad that you permitted Abinash to visit me and you and your wife joined him." Mukunda was in his mother's lap and was blessed by the master. Bhagbati and his wife became his lifelong disciples.

..... (**"Autobiography of a Yogi" by Yogananda**)

28. One night at 10 p.m. Yogananda (before he had met his master Swami Yukteshwar) meditated and the Holy Mother appeared. Next morning he went to call on Lahiri Mahashaya who was at that time in Calcutta. Without telling him anything, the master told him, "Did my beloved Mother say anything about me when you received Her last night at 10 p.m.."

Then after some conversation, the master told Yogananda, "I am not your Guru. He shall come a little later. Through his guidance your experience of the Divine in terms of Love and Devotion will be translated into fathomless wisdom."

Later, once in Benaras (where he was living in Swami Dayananda's 'ashram') Yogananda, while marketing for the ashram, saw a Christ-like man in ochre robe. He followed and called, "Guru Deva" as he came close to him. He replied, "O! my own, you have come to me. How many years have I waited for you?"

He took his hand in his and carried him to his place of residence in Benaras. after some conversation with him, Swami Yukteshwara gave his Serampore address and wanted him to come over there in four weeks. Yogananda through Lahiri Mahashya's master. In his talk with him, he could understand that his master knew all about him. Yukteshwara was a disciple of Lahiri Mahashaya who would generally call him priya. The monastic name of Yukteshwara (it means 'united with Ishwara') was used by him only after Lahiri Mahashaya gave up his astral body. Swami Yukteshwara taught Yogananda how to summon the blessed experience at will and how to transmit it to others. Yogananda tranmitted the cosmic vision to a number of 'kriya Yogis' in the East and the West.

'Kriya Yoga' is a yogic technique whereby the sensory tumult is stilled, permitting man to achieve an ever increasing identity with cosmic consciousness.

..... ("Autobiography of a Yogi" by Yogananda)

29. One of the sisters of Yogananda was Roma. She was married to Satish Chandra Bose. Satish would often ridicule Roma for her meditation. She wanted her brother to help her change him. Yogananda once took Satish and Roma to Dakshineshwar. As they entered the temple, Satish who was scornful all the way, desired to have lunch at the proper time for which he wanted Yogananda to speak to the temple authorities for the advance booking. Yogananda did not do the booking for lunch but instead went straight to meditate in the temple. Satish and Roma roamed there about. Yogananda was in deep meditation for five hours in front of the Divine Mother but She made

no response till the temple doors were about to be closed. So he opened his eyes, disheartened and sad, went in the courtyard and experienced the hot flooring of temple premises causing discomfort to his feet. He said in his heart, "Divine Mother you did not come to me in my vision and now you are behind locked doors. I wanted to offer special prayers for my brother-in-law." The inward petition of Yogananda was granted and he felt a cold wave descent on him and no more the discomfort in his feet. Then he felt the temple greatly magnified, the steel door open gradually revealing the stone figure of Mother Kali. The stature turned into a living form thrilling him with joy. This was followed by an ecstatic enlargement of consciousness and he could see several miles beyond the wall of the temple, which became transparent.

In this entire vision, the only enlarged objects were the temple and the form of Goddess. He could also see among other things, his brother-in-law sitting under a Bel tree. He could even discern his thoughts and immediately turned to the Goddess, "Will Thou not, spiritually change my sister's husband?" The Mother replied, "Thy wish is granted." As the vision disappeared, he went to Satish over the hot pavement of the temple. A temple priest told him in presence of Satish that he had prepared lunch for them, much to Satish's bewilderment as he knew that Yogananda had not ordered for lunch. This incident changed Satish.

..... ("Autobiography of a Yogi" by Yogananda)

30. Giri Bala (whom Yogananda met after his return from the United States in 1935) used to live without eating anything. She had given up eating at the age of 12 years and 4 months, and when Yogananda went to meet her she was 68 years old. On enquiring why she gave up eating and how she survived, she said, "Your nourishment is derived from the cosmic power, that recharges your body through medulla oblongeta. In my childhood I had an insatiable appetite. I was only 12 years when I was married in a family in Nawab Gunj in Bengal. My mother-in-law ridiculed me every morning, noon, and evening about my gluttonous habits. Her scolding was a blessing in disguise. One morning her ridicule was merciless and I told her that soon she shall see that I will neither touch food nor water. After meditation, one day, I went to have bath in the Ganges and saw a Guru sent by God appear before me. He said that I could live on astral light alone from today and that my bodily atoms would lie charged by the infinite current. Since then I did not eat."

..... (**"Autobiography of a Yogi" by Yogananda**)

31. When Yogananda returned to the States in Sept. 1936, he carried with him a number of gifts for his fond disciples. He had collected the gifts like 'Gucchi' from Kashmir, Canned Rasagolla and mango pulp, Papar, Keora oil etc. from Calcutta and many other presents from various parts of India, besides Palestine, Egypt, England, France, Italy etc. He purchased a silver cup (among other things) in Calcutta and thought that Mr. Dickenson, who was his disciple from 1925, would like it.

When he was celebrating X-mas at Los Angeles with his disciples, he distributed the gifts and when he gave the silver cup to Dickenson, the latter was happy with tears of joy in his eyes. Later he told Yogananda, "Sir, let me thank you for the gift. For the last 43 years I have been waiting for that silver cup. I was 5 years old when my brother pushed me in a 15 feet deep pool. As I was drowning, I saw a dazzling light and visualized a man with tranquil eyes. I was lifted from the pond and recovered. At the age of 17 years, I visited Chicago with my mother where the great Parliament of Religions was going on in September 1893. As I was walking with my mother, I visualized the same figure I had seen in my vision 12 years ago. I ran after him, as he was entering the hall and found him sitting on the dais. I waited. I learnt that he was the famous Swami Vivekananda from India. I went near him and thought he would accept me as my 'Guru'. He instantlyn said, "No, my son, I am not your Guru. Your teacher will come later and give you a silver cup." With this, Dickenson prostrated again before Yogananda who took him as his disciple.

..... ("Autobiography of a Yogi" by Yogananda)

32. Fixity of attention depends on slow breathing. Quick or uneven breaths are inevitable accompaniment of harmful emotive stress viz. fear, lust, and anger. Man breathes an average of 18 times a minute, monkey 32 times and giant tortoise with an age of 300 years 4 times. Elephant, snake, younger tortoise and other creatures breathe lesser number of times than man.

..... ("Autobiography of a Yogi" by Yogananda)

33. Chinese traveller Hieun Tsang has left an account of the vast Kumbh Mela in the year 644 A.D. at Allahabad. Kumbh Mela is held every three years successively in Hardwar, Allahabad, Nasik and Ujjain and returns to Hardwar to complete the 12 years cycle. Each city holds the 'Ardha Kumbh' (half Kumbh) in the sixth year.

..... **("Autobiography of a Yogi" by Yogananda)**

34. A 'Devyayug' comprises 'Satyayug', 'Tretayug', 'Dwaparyug' and 'Kaliyug'. Our one year is day and night for 'Devtas'. Our 360 years is one year for 'Devtas'. Such 12000 years of 'Devtas' is called 'Mahayug or Chaturyug'.

Kaliyug	-	4,32,000 years.
Dwaparyug	-	8,64,000 years (Double that of Kaliyug)
Tretayug	-	12,96,000 years (Thrice that of Kaliyug)
Satyayug	-	17,28,000 years (Four times of Kaliyug)
Duration of 'Devyayug'		43,20,000 years

Such 100 'Devyayug' is one day for Brahma and as long is His night.

..... **("Bhagwad Gita" by Jaidayal Goendka)**

35. Kuber is the grandson of Pulastya Rishi. His father's name is Vishruwa and his mother is Devarnani, daughter of Bhardwaj Rishi. After deep meditation, Brahma was pleased and told him to ask for a boon. He requested for

being the holder of Treasures of Gods. Brahma wanted him to be as good as Indra. He, therefore, made him the fourth Lokapal and Incharge of all Treasures in the Heavens. He was also given a 'Pushpak Vimana'.

..... ("Bhagwad Gita" by Jaidayal Goendka)

36. Pipal is considered to be holy tree by Hindus. In its root is Vishnu, in its trunk is Keshav, in its branches is Narayan, in its leaves is Hari, in its fruit there always resides the 'Achyuta', the Supreme united with all Gods. This tree grants man his desires and wards off his sins.

..... ("Bhagwad Gita" by Jaidayal Goendka)

37. Suggestion can neither have fixed rule of grammar nor the rigid definition of a lexicon so easily available to the scholar. Suggestion has its unanalyzable code which finds its depth of explanation in the living hearts of people who use it. Code words philologically treated appear childish and one must know that all those experiences which are not realized through the path of reason but immediately through an inner vision must use some kind of code words for their expression. All poetry is full of such words and therefore, poems of one language can never be properly translated into another language, nay, nor even respoken in the same language.

..... ("Tagore's Philosophy of Upnishads" by Dr. Radhakrishnan)

38. When our self is illuminated with the light of love, them the negative aspect of its separateness with others loses its finality, then our relationship with others is no longer that of competition and conflict but of sympathy and co-operation.

..... ("Tagore's Philosophy of Upnishads" by Dr. Radhakrishnan)

39. Manu (who came around 100-200 A.D.) says, "He who gives no creature willingly the pain of confinement or death but seeks good of all, enjoys bliss. Slaughter of animals obstructs the way to Heavens. Eating flesh, drinking Soma juice and carnal intercourse are not a sin as such. Enjoyment is natural but abstention from them produces great reward."

..... (Manava Dharma Shastra)

40. The first parliament of religions was held in Chicago on 11.9.1893. Swami Vivekananda delivered his famous address on 19.9.1893 and then again on 27.9.1893.

..... (Parliament of Religions to celebrate birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda)

41. Lord Buddha was born near Kapilvastu in Nepal on the foothills of Himalaya in 623 B.C. and lived 80 years. Shankara was born at Kalady in Kerala in 686 A.D. and lived only 32 years. Vivekananda was born in Calcutta in 1863 and lived only 39 years.

..... (Parliament of Religions to celebrate birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda)

42. The seer philosopher shankaracharya was fully loyal to Vedas and only some records reveal that he lived in the sixth century. The sage Anandagiri gives the dates 44 to 12 years B.C. Western historians associate Shankara to the eighth century. By seven years of age he had a complete study of the Vedas. He approached Govindapada, a perfect knower of Brahaman, for instruction and initiation into monastic life. He was asked to write a commentary on Badrayana Vyasa's Brahma Sutras, a resume of Upnishadic teachings and the basis of Vedantic Philosophy. He went to Varanasi at the age of 12 years. Sanandana, his disciple joined him. Then he went to Hardwar and Badrinath, where he wrote the commentaries of ten principal Upnishads, the Brahamasutra and Bhagwad Gita and the triple basis of Vedanta Philosophy which took him three years.

Shankaracharya's four disciples were Padamapada, Sureshwara, Hastamaika and Totakacharya. 'Maths' in Sringeri (South), Puri (East), Dwarka (West) and Kashi (North) were set up to teach the Vedas.

He left his body in 'mahasamadhi' at Kedarnath.

..... **(Parliament of Religions to celebrate birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda)**

43. In the concluding address at Chicago on 27-9-93, Swami Vivekananda said,

"If the parliament of religions has shown anything in the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world and that every

system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence if anybody dreams of an exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will be written "Help and not fight, assimilation and not destruction, harmony and peace and not dissension."

He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased really worships Shiva. And if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is preliminary. He who has served and helped the poor man seeing Shiva in him without thinking of his caste or creed or race or anything, with him, Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in the temple.

..... (Parliament of Religions to celebrate birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda)

44. We have God in us. We are manifestations of God and His agents and representatives. He can only act through us and apart from us cannot exist.

..... (Sir Francis Younghusband)

45. No man is complete without a woman and no woman without a man. Men and women are made for each other. Each craves for the other and only in their union is their happiness complete. It is the same with all creatures. Love of man and woman for each other must always be treated as something unspeakably sacred, never belittled,

never derided, never coarsened, never cheapened, always treasured as the most precious thing in life.

..... ("**Vital religions - a brotherhood of faith**" **by Sir F. Younghusband**)

46. Peace on Earth, goodwill towards men, democracy must cling to that message. For it is my deep conviction that democracy cannot live without that true religion which gives nation a sense of justice and of moral purpose above our political forms, above our market places. The altar of faith is the altar on which burn the fires of devotion that maintain all that is best in us and in our nations. We have need for that devotion today.

..... (**President Roosevelt's last words of his last speech of his Presidential campaign**)

47. The spectacle of what is called religion or at any rate organized religion in India has filled me with horror. I have frequently condemned it and wish to make a clean sweep of it. Almost always, it seems to me, it stood for a blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation and the preservation of vested interests.

..... (**Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru**)

48. The four rewards of human existence are :

* Religious merit (Dharma)
* Material riches (Artha)
* Sensuous enjoyments (Kama)
* Release from bondage of Worldly existence (Moksha)

49. Valmiki was a hunter and a highway robber in his early life. He was reclaimed by the Seven Seers and eventually turned out to be a great Seer and a prolific poet.

50. According to Bhagvata, Narada was born of a maid servant in his previous birth and even as a child came in touch with holy men who imparted him the highest wisdom and made him a real devotee. In the next birth he appeared as the son of mind born Brahma.

51. Agastya was begotton to God Varuna through a pitcher. Vasishtha was born of the same pitcher. Their association in the embryonic state with the great Sage made him equally great. Agastya is said to have drunk the ocean in three draughts.

52. Kumbhakarna, the younger brother of Ravana was a voracious eater and kept awake six months and slept for another six months.

53. Ghandharvas are celestial songsters of handsome appearance, Kinnaras have the head of a horse and Rakshasas are monsters who roam at night and feed on human flesh. Nagas are semi divine beings though resembling snakes but can take human form at will.

54. Bhagvata says that Vishnu assumed the form of a gigantic Tortoise in order to support Mount Mandhara and prevent it from sinking while it was being rotated by Gods and demons while churning the Ocean (Samudra Manthan).

55. Ramayana was originally composed by Brahma Himself and delivered to Lord Shiva through Narada. It is believed to have consisted of 100 crore verses.

56. The nine sentiments of poetry are those of love, humour, pathos, heroism, wrath, terror, disgust, quietism and amazement.

57. The fire of Yoga is produced by Yogis through the friction of the vital airs within the body.

58. The God of Love is believed to be armed with five kinds of arrows each comprising a white lotus, the Ashoka flower, the mango blossom, the jasmine and the blue lotus.

59. Shedding of tears is regarded in India as an ill-omen. On auspicious occasion Indian women take particular care not to allow tears to come to their eyes.

60. According to Hindu scriptures, the universe is divided into fourteen spheres, seven higher and seven lower. In their ascending order the higher spheres are Bhuh, Bhuvah, Swah, Mahah, Janah, Tapah and Satyam, while the lower spheres in their descending order are Atal, Vital, Sutal, Talatal, Mahatal, Rasatal and Patal.

61. The sixteen forms of female adornments are :

* Cleaning body with fragrant unguents.
* Ablutions.
* Putting on new attire.
* Dying the sides of feet with red lac.
* Dressing the hair.
* Adorning the parting line of hair with red lead.
* Painting forehead with streaks of sandal paste.
* Dotting the chin with a black spot.
* Colouring the palms and soles with Mehendhi.

* Anointing ones body with perfumed unguents.
* Use of jewelled ornaments.
* Beautifying hair with wreaths of flowers.
* Perfuming and dying mouth with betel leaves.
* Colouring of teeth.
* Painting the lips red.
* Applying collyrium to eyes.

62. A completely white horse and dark only in ears, which is a rare breed, was considered suitable for Horse Sacrifice.

63. Nishadas are a low born tribe in India tracing their descent from a Brahmin through a Shudra woman.

64. The five forms of self restraint i.e. 'Yamas' are :

* Non-violence in thought, word and deed (Ahimsa).
* Truthfulness (Satya).
* Abstinence from sexual indulgence in every form (Brahamcharya).
* Depriving oneself of all possessions (Aparigraha).
* Non stealing (Asteya).

65. The five religious observances i.e. 'niyams' are :

* External and internal purity (Soucha).
* Contentment (Santosha).
* Religious austerity (Tapas).
* Study of Vedas and muttering of Divine name (Swadhyaya).
* Meditation on God (Ishwara Pranidhana).

66. The five principal deities of the Hindu Pantheon are :

* Lord Ganesha.
* Goddess Gauri.
* Lord Shiva.
* Sun God.
* Vishnu.

They represent the Supreme Divinity. A Hindu worships any one of These or all the five together as his chosen deity or deities.

67. Bhagwad Gita enumerates the following characteristics which make up spiritual wisdom. The absence of pride, freedom of hypocrisy, non-violence, forgiveness, guilelessness, devout service to one's preceptor, purity of body and mind, steadfastness, subjugation of mind, aversion to objects of sense, absence of egotism, pondering again and again on the painful character of and evils inherent in birth, death, old age and disease; absence of attachment and feeling of mineness in respect of one's son, wife, home etc; and constant equipoise of mind both in favourable and unfavourable circumstances; unflinching devotion to the Lord through exclusive attachment, living in secluded and holy places; and finding no enjoyment in company of men, fixity in self knowledge and seeing God as the object of true knowledge.

68. Nine forms of devotion as enumerated in Bhagvata are :

* Hearing Lord's praises and stories (Shravan).
* Chanting Lord's name, praises and stories (Kirtana).
* Fixing one's thoughts in Him (Smarna).

* Adoring His feet (Padaseva).
* Worshipping the image of Lord (Archana).
* Making obeisance to the Lord (Vandana).
* Offering devout service to the Lord (Dasya).
* Cultivating friendship with the Lord (Sakhya).
* Offering oneself to the Lord (Atmanivedana).

69. Shabri though low born had acquired celebrity for her piety and devotion. She belonged to the wild tribe of Shabras and hence her name. Her Guru, a Sage, had predicted to her on the eve of his demise that Shri Rama would visit her.

70. Sugriva and others, though monkeys by appearance were as good as civilized men and were incarnations of Gods. They could change their form at will, were proficient in arts and sciences and could speak like men and walk straight, yet climb walls and trees like monkeys.

71. Scriptures mention that Lord Shiva personally whispers the name of Rama into the right ear of every creature dying at Kashi and redeems its soul.

72. Sage Kashyapa was the progenitor of Gods and demons. He got two sons by Vinata (the mother of feathered creation) named Aruna and Garuda. Aruna serves as the charioteer of the Sun God and Garuda became the mount of God Vishnu. Sampati and Jatayu were the sons of Aruna and belonged to the earliest period of World's history. They not only had long life but could speak and behave like human beings.

73. It used to be customary with Indian women to wear a single braid when separated from their husbands.

74. 'Kalpa' denotes the span of life of the Universe which has been calculated to cover 43,200 lakh years. It is divided into 1000 'Chaturyugas' Each 'Chaturyuga' comprises 'Kaliyuga' of 4.32 lakh years, Dwaparyug' of 8.64 lakh years, 'Tretayuga' of 12.96 years, and 'Satyayuga' of 17.28 lakh years.

75. Once upon a time Vali was performing Sandhya. Ravana came stealthily to attack him. Vali smelt him as Ravana came close behind him. Vali got up and caught Ravana's neck in his armpit and held it like that till he completed his Sandhya and offering of water to manes. Then Brahma came to Ravana's rescue and got him released.

76. Maruts are the Gods of Wind and are forty nine in number and each presides over a particular type of wind. Only at the time of universal dissolution that all the types of wind are let loose by the God of destruction.

77. Lord Shiva Himself had taken the form of Hanuman.

78. The ten quarters along with their regents are named below :

* East	:	Indra, the Lord of Celestial
* South East	:	Agni, the God of Fire
* South	:	Yama, God who decides and dispenses the fruit of one's good and bad deeds.
* South West	:	Nirrti, the God of Death and Lord of benevolent 'Rakshasas'

* West : Varuna, the God of Waters
* North West : Vayu, the Wind God
* North : Kubera, the God of riches
* North East : Ishana, Lord Shiva
* Upper Region : Brahma, the Creator
* Lower Region : Ananta, the Serpent God

79. Brahma had cursed Meghanada that his death would occur only at the hands of one who has neither slept nor eaten any food for twelve years. Ever since Laxmana had left Ayodhya, he had neither slept nor taken any food. It is Vibhishana who told this secret to Shri Rama with the request to allow Laxmana to accompany him to kill Meghanada.

80. The four states of consciousness are :

Waking life, sound sleep, dream and pure impersonal state.

81. The four common methods of persuasion are :

Argument, inducement in the shape of a gift, use of force or punishment and sowing seeds of dissension.

82. The Sages Sanaka and his three brothers are the first progeny of Brahma during the present creation. Hence, they are the eldest of all creation. Being perpetual celibates, they are still living in the abode of Brahma.

THE EXPLOITS OF SHRI RAMA

SHRI RAMACHARITAMANASA
(THE MANASAROVAR OF MIND CLEANSING DEEDS AND EXPLOITS OF SHRI RAMA)

PRELUDE

"Varnanamarth sanganam rasanam chhandsamapi;
mangalanam cha kartaro vande Vaani Vinayako."

..... (Shri Ramacharitamanasa, Descent - I/1)

(I reverence Vaani (the Goddess of Speech) and Vinayaka (Lord Ganesha), the originators of sounds characterized by alphabets and produced by multitudes of objects, the poetic sentiments and metres, and the begetters of all blessings.)

Valmiki got the inspiration to write Ramayana after he unwittingly spoke the following verse :

"Ma Nishada pratishtham tvam gamah,
shashvatih samah;
Yat kronch mithunadhekam vadih,
kama mohitama."

(O' Nishada you could not wait for long because you killed the male bird while this pair of birds was making love to each other.)

One day at noon Maharishi Valmiki was enjoying

the beauty of nature on the banks of the Tamsa river. He heard the sweet note of a 'kronch' and saw a pair of these birds making love to each other. They would touch their beaks and then twist their long necks around each other or rub their back with their beaks. One moment they would fly a little distance away and the next moment they would return and sit close to each other. Suddenly while they were caressing each other the male bird was hit by an arrow of 'Nishada' (hunter) and it fell down struggling for life. The female bird made sorrowful notes and was in tears. The sight of the wailing bird deeply touched Valmiki's heart and his feelings found an expression in the above verse.

Valmiki was depressed for a long time and told Bhardwaja, his favourite disciple, about the episode and the verse he unwittingly uttered. Bhardwaja remembered the verse and recited it melodiously to Valmiki who was much pleased. On his way back to his 'Ashram', it occurred to Valmiki that by saying 'Ma Nishada' he had inadvertently given a curse to 'Nishada' (the hunter) and started feeling bad about it. He was reminded of what Narada had told him once when he met him sometime ago. He had asked Narada to name a person who abounds in virtue, strength, observes 'Dharma', believes in truth, keeps his word, does good to every one, has knowledge and is the most beautiful. Narada had told him that Shri Rama, the son of Dashratha and belonging to Ikshvaku race is the most ideal person. He is the ocean of virtue and beauty but when He gets angry not only demons but even 'Devtas' tremble in fear. The story of Shri Rama, that Narada had told him in brief, came to the surface of his mind and he regained his tranquility and felt much relieved.

In retrospection of 'Ma Nishada', he remembered how Shri Rama Chandra had killed Ravana and eliminated him from the Ravana-Mandhodari couple. Ravana was cruel and met his fate and with this his distress of having said 'Ma Nishada' disappeared.

One day while Valmiki was sitting and chanting the above verse, Lord Brahma came and told him that he would like him to compose in the same meter (Anushtap Chhanda) the story of Shri Rama revealed to him by Narada. Lord Brahma assured him that though Narada had narrated it in brief to him, the entire story of Shri Rama would get revealed to him as and when he started writing it and he should pen it down truthfully. Lord Brahma said that the story shall benefit the humanity till eternity and would be preserved for ages.

Taking inspiration from Brahma, Valmiki started writing Ramayana and as he wrote, the picture of Shri Rama, Sita, Laxmana, Dashratha, his Queens and the rest started rolling before his eyes and he composed the Epic Ramayana consisting of 24,000 'shlokas' in verse.

Later Sant Tulsidas wrote the story of Shri Rama in Avadhi language (a dialect of Uttar Pradesh) to make it easier for general masses to read and understand the Epic. His composition is known as 'Ramacharitamanasa' and contains all about the life and exploits of Shri Rama. Ramayana has been written in many other languages in India, besides in Indonesia, Thailand, etc.

Shri Rama is the personification of truth and virtue. He possesses all the traita of an ideal human being that one can think of. He is charmingly beautiful with face glowing like a blazing Sun, jet black hair winding over His serene and composed head like a stream of the Ganges, large receding forehead like Mount Kailash, eyebrows curved like a rainbow, eyes deep as the Pacific Ocean, lips wielding an ever pleasant smile like a blossoming Blue Lotus, perfectly shaped nose as if rendering shade and cool breeze to tender Lotus like lips, long slender 'Shesha' like neck glowing like a sapphire amidst jewel-studded necklace, large shoulders exuding immeasurable strength, long arms bent forth to hold 'Sharangh Dhanush' with the left hand and cast terror in those who flout 'Dharma' and give blessing to the pious and warmth to the depressed with His right hand, soft and tender body resembling the clear blue sky in depth and hue, lotus-like feet the touch of even dust of which can mitigate one's sorrow's for ever. He excels in wisdom and valour. He abounds in knowledge, righteousness and strength and is merciful. He has immeasurable love for His devotees and is kind to the meek and down-trodden. He is unforgiving while punishing the cruel and the wicked. He is the upholder of 'Dharm'. He is truthful in word and deed. He possesses immaculate character that is endowed with innumerable virtues. All His noble deeds and heroic exploits as a toddler, in boyhood, youth, and adulthood, as a son, a brother, a student, a person on duty, a husband, a friend, a devotee, a worshipper and worshipped, a master, an asylum-renderer, a protector, a forgiver, a crusader of 'Dharm', and a valiant warrior in the battle field, a just and illustrious monarch, etc.

fill upto the brim, the 'Manasarovar' of His Unfathomable yet transparent personality worth imbibing permanently in one's mind to cleanse and purify in of all sins. Hence, the name 'Ramacharitamanasa'. Reciting, listening to, or reflecting in one's mind the story of Shri Rama is like washing off the dirt of one's sins in the pure holy waters of Lake Manasarovar.

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SHRI RAMACHARITAMANASA (THE MANASAROVAR OF MIND CLEANSING DEEDS AND EXPLOITS OF SHRI RAMA)

****

DESCENT - I (BALA KANDA)

"Ramachandra mukh chandra chhabi lochan charu chakor;
karat paan sadar sakal Prabhu pramodu na thor."

..... (Shri Ramacharitamanasa, Descent - I/321)

(The graceful eyes of all fondly drank in the beauty of Shri Ramachandra's countenance with the utmost love and rapture much the same way as the Chakora bird feeds on the rays of the moon.)

Sant Tulsidas commenced writing the story of Shri Rama in the year 1574 A.D. (Samvat Year 1631). He begins the "Ramacharitamanasa" with prayers respectively to Goddess Saraswati, Lord Ganesha, Goddess Parvati, Lord Shiva, Rishi Valmiki, Lord Hanuman, Sita - the consort of Shri Rama and Shri Rama - the bestower of all blessings, whose superiority is beyond measure and whose illusive power (Maya) is greater than that of any God or Demon. The story has been composed in beautifully worded `Chaupais', `Chhandas', `Sorathas' and `Dohas' and is based on various Puranas, Vedas and Tantras in addition to the Epic Ramayana composed by Rishi Valmiki in Sanskrit.

The Manasa is dedicated to Shri Rama whose holy name brings blessings and wards off evils and is muttered by Lord Shiva and His consort Uma. Kaka Bhushandi, the Sage in the form of a crow, heard the story of Shri Rama from Lord Shiva Himself. He narrated it to Sage Yajnavalkya who related the same to Sage Bhardwaja when they met at Triveni, where Gods, saints and all those who have faith in the glory of Gods come in the month of Magha, when Sun enters the sign of Capricorn, and devoutly bathe in the triple streams of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Saraswati.

Shri Rama was born on Tuesday, 'Chaitra Shukla Naumi' (bright half) at Ayodhya, situated on the banks of the river Saryu. Both Ayodhya and the Saryu are regarded as sacred by the Hindus from times immemorial.

Lord Shiva and Sati set out to have a glimpse of Shri Rama

Lord Shiva once decided to seek a 'darshan' (glimpse) of Shri Rama in forests during the time of their exile. While He along with His consort, Sati, were going Shri Rama, through 'Maya', appeared to only Lord Shiva but not to Sati. After the 'darshan' He decided to return to Mount Kailash, His abode. Sati saw Him visibly happy. He revealed to Her the greatness of Shri Rama. Greatly impressed by His words, She expressed Her desire to return and have Shri Rama's 'darshan'. Lord Shiva permitted Her to go and told Her that He would wait for Her at the same spot till She returned. She went back

hurriedly and saw Shri Rama clad in saffron clothes and walking bare-footed along with His consort Sita and brother Laxmana. Shri Rama's simple outfit and condition did not match the words of praise for Him that Lord Shiva had spoken to Her. Sati, through Her 'Maya' assumed the form of Sita and approached them in order to test Shri Rama. Though Sita and Laxmana were astonished to see Her, Shri Rama recognized Her immediately and told Her that He Himself was Shri Rama and enquired of Her as to where Lord Shiva was Thus, seeing Shri Rama and His powers to recognize Her, She returned to the same place where Her Lord was waiting for Her. On meeting Lord Shiva, Sati Said that She saw Shri Rama and wished Him. She, however, did not disclose the actual story of Her meeting. Lord Shiva (who sees and knows every thing) knew what had actually happened and was as such upset on Sati for not revealing the facts to Him. Visibly disappointed, He decided to shun Sita on two accounts. Firstly because She had doubted the greatness of Shri Rama whom He held in His highest esteem. Secondly She had appeared before Shri Rama in the guise of Sita whom He revered so much that He would consider even Her shadow equally reverent. A Divine Voice (Akash Vani) came saying, "What Thou think is correc. " On reaching Mount Kailash, the Lord went into meditation (samadhi). He ignored and avoided Sati and this continued for long.

Sati consumes herself in 'Yoga-Agni'

A number of aerial cars (vimans) carrying Gods and Kinnaras crossed over Mount Kailash. On an enquiry made by Sati, Lord Shiva told Her that Daksha, Her father had got the title of Prajapati and had organized a huge sacrifice (Yagya) and all Gods and Kinnaras were going there as guests of Daksha. Lord Shiva knew that Daksha had not invited Him and His consort intentionally and therefore, did not agree to Sati's requests for allowing Her to participate in Her father's 'Yagya'. When She insisted, the Lord allowed Her to go. On reaching Daksha's house She found every member of Daksha's family participating in the 'Yagya' and that all Gods and others were present there except Lord Shiva. She was deeply hurt when Her father Daksha neither welcomed Her nor talked to Her. She felt further insulted when She found that Her father had not provided for the share of offering to Lord Shiva in the 'Yagya'. She did not even like the attitude of Her mother and sisters who gave Her a cold reception. She said in utter humiliation and fury, "Those who have sinned thus, will see the wrath of Lord Shiva." Saying this, She consumed Herself in the flames of 'Yoga-Agni'. This created a great commotion at the 'Yagya Shala' and in the minds of those dear to Lord Shiva. The Lord conceived all that was happening at the 'Yagya' and sent Vir Bhadra, created from one steak of His hair, to destroy everything at the place of sacrifice (Yagya Shala). Vir Bhadra was mighty and had all the power and strength bestowed on him by the Lord. He, with all fury and power in him, destroyed everything at the 'Yagya Shala', beat all those who had despised the Lord and threw everything helter and skelter.

Sati's rebirth as Uma

Sati, while being consumed by 'Yoga-Agni' prayed that She be born a spouse to Lord Shiva in all Her rebirths. She later took birth at Himachal's house as Uma (Parvati) and was born to Himvaan and Maina.

Uma's marriage with Shiva

One day it so happened that Narada came to Himvaan and saw Uma. On seeing the girl he forecast Her future and told Himvaan that She shall marry a 'Jatadhari' (long haired), naked and ill dressed 'Yogi'. Uma's parents naturally got worried but She at once understood that Narada referred to none other than Lord Shiva. Saying this, Narada set forth on his onward journey. One day while sleeping, Uma saw in Her dream, a Rishi coming to Her and advising Her to undertake an austere meditation to win over Lord Shiva and get married to Him. Uma informed Her mother about the dream and set out for meditation. She meditated for a thousand years eating only fruits and roots, a hundred years sustaining only on leafy vegetables, three thousand years only on dried 'Bel' leaves, besides thriving sometimes only on water and sometimes observing total fast. Finally She heard a Divine Voice that Her meditation was successful and that She should return home when Her father Himvaan would call Her back. While Uma was meditating, Lord Shiva Himself was still engrossed in meditation. Shri Rama appeared to Him and asked Him to marry Uma. Lord Shiva readily agreed. However, in order to ascertain Uma's wish, He sent 'Sapta Rishis' to test Uma's desire and determination to marry Him. The Sapta Rishis' met Uma and tried

to persuade Her not to marry Lord Shiva, advancing a lot of reasons but to their astonishment they found Uma bent upon marrying Shiva alone. They accordingly reported this to Lord Shiva and persuaded Him to marry Uma. Conscious of Shri Rama's desire, He sent the 'Sapta Rishis' to Himvaan with the proposal. Himvaan called for his daughter and knowing Her willingness, accepted the proposal. On an appointed auspicious date, the marriage was solemnized. Gods showered flowers on the couple. At the time of departure of Uma with Lord Shiva, Maina advised Uma, "your prime duty is to always adore Shiva's feet. Your husband alone is your God and above everybody else. " Lord Shiva took Her to His abode on Mount Kailash.

Narration of the descent of Shri Rama by Lord Shiva

One day Uma requested Lord Shiva to narrate the story of Shri Rama. She told Him, "In my previous birth, I made just one mistake and suffered immensely." The Lord told Her, "Shri Rama is Truth, Consciousness and Bliss. He is all-pervading Brahama; the Supreme bliss personified and the highest Lord. It is this jewel of Raghu's race who is my Master." Speaking thus the Lord bowed to Shri Rama. He further told Her, "Whenever virtue declines, vice prevails and vile and haughty demons multiply and create trouble, disorder and pain to others on the Earth, the gracious Lord Shri Rama assumes a transcendental form and relieves the distress of the virtuous." Lord Shiva then narrated the following story of Shri Rama's descent to Uma:

Svayambhu Manu (self-born Brahma) and his wife Shatrupa (created from half of his own body) once ruled over God's creation. Their son was King Uttanapada who begot Dhruva, the celebrated 'Hari Bhakta'. Manu's other son was priyavrata who finds mention in Vedas and Puransa. Manu's daughter Devhuti was married to Kardama Muni. Svayambhu Manu ruled for a long time and finally abdicated his thone giving charge to his son. He and Shatrupa took to severe meditation and 'Hari Bhakti'. While meditating for many years they kept on repeating the 12 lettered formula, "Om Namaha Bhagvate Vasudevaye." Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh appeared to them a number of times suggesting them to ask for any boon for their devoted penance, but they refrained from asking for it. They, however, continued with their meditation until they heard an 'Akashvani' (Divine Voice) biding them to ask for a boon. On hearing the voice, they opened their eyes and found themselves completely rejuvenated. They asked for a 'darshan' of Lord Hari in the form He had shown Himself to Lord Shiva and Kaka Bhushandi. The Lord appeared before them in the most radiant, elegant and beautiful form with lovely and enchanting cheeks and chin, a conch shell like neck, a charming nose, smiling face, fish shaped ear-rings and a crown glittering with jewels and diamonds adorning His head. He had curly hair, strings of precious stones and jewelled ornaments and a sacred thread around His neck. He had long arms, a quiver full of arrows tied to His waist and a bow in His hands. The naval on His abdomen looked like eddies on the Yamuna and His lotus feet were charming and attractive. His swarthy form resembled a blue lotus. His primordial energy Sita, Herself a storehouse of beauty and the source of the Universe, stood on His left side.

Beholding this form of Shri Hari, the Ocean of Beholding this form of Shri Hari, the Oceanof Beauty, Manu and Shatrupa were spell-bound and gazed intently. They lost consciousness and the gracious Lord touched their heads and lifted them up. Lord Hari prompted them to seek a boon and they desired to have a son like the Lord Himself. The Lord gave His assent. The Lord said that He would send them to dwell in the Capital of Indra (Chief of Gods) to experience the enjoyment there, after which they would be born as the King and Queen of Ayodhya respectively and He Himself would be born to them as their son assuming a human guise. Lord Hari disappeared thereafter. Manu and Shatrupa lived for rest of their lives in their hermitage and when time came they abandoned their body and took abode in Amravati, the city of Immortals.

After concluding the above story, Lord Shiva told Uma another cause of Shri Rama's birth.

Satyaketu was the King of Kaikaya. He had two gallant sons, Pratapabhanu and Arimardhana. Satyaketu withdrew from his throne, giving charge to the elder son and himself went to jungles to spend the eve of his life in 'Hari Bhakti'. Pratapabhanu subjugated all Kings by the force of his Army and after winning many battles became a 'Chakravarty Raja'. One day he went to a dense forest in Vindhyachal for a hunt. He killed many a deer. Suddenly he saw a bulky boar and ran after him Seeing arrows being showered on him, the boar ran fast occasionally crouching behind bushes to save himself. The King did not give up his chase and saw the boar enter a deep mountain cave. He could not find any access to the cave and had to return disappointed. Having got

tired and feeling thirsty he went in search of a pond or a stream. Wandering thus, he came across a cave. Inside the cave he found a hermit (who actually was a monarch defeated by Pratapabhanu himself). The hermit recognized the King but the King could not recognize the monarch who had taken the guise of an anchorite. The King, therefore, paid his obeisance and with due respect asked for some food and water. The false anchorite showed him a lake nearby where the King and his horse quenched their thirst. They returned to the cave and the anchorite asked him as to who he was. Pratapabhanu, being clever, did not disclose his name but instead said that he was a minister of a ' Chakravarty Raja' named Pratapabhanu and had lost his way while hunting in the jungle. The anchorite proposed him to stay overnight and return in the morning as his palaces were very far from the cave. The king readily agreed. The anchorite felt delighted and wanted to avenge the agony of his defeat that had reduced him to such a miserable plight. He told the King upon his enquiry that he was penniless and homeless and lived in the jungle too far away to be noticed and disturbed by anyone so that he could spend all his time meditating upon Shri Hari. The anchorite impressed the King by revealing that his name was Ekatanu and he had taken birth at the first dawn of creation. He told him that through the occult powers he could easily make out that he was Pratapabhanu, the son of king Satyaketu. He narrated to him lots of legendary stories. The king got more and more impressed by him and asked for a boon that he should be free from old age, death and suffering and become invincible. The false anchorite granted the boon but warned that if he ever fell prey to a Brahmin's

curse on any account, the boon would be rendered ineffective. The false anchorite told him not to reveal the story of his meeting to anyone as otherwise it would bring him harm. The King implored the anchorite to devise a way by which a Brahmin's curse could be avoided. The anchorite said, "This could be achieved if I always accompany you but being an anchorite I do not live in anyone's house." The King persuaded him to stay with him in the Palace. He agreed to join him on the condition that he shall be an incognito cook and whatever he cooked, would be served by the King himself. The anchorite suggested to the King that he could throw a huge banquet and invite a large number of Brahmins who would eat the food cooked by him and in this way the King would be able to win their love and sympathy and his subjects would become amenable to his orders. The King thanked him in delight and fell at his feet. The anchorite advised the King to take rest and go to sleep. As he fell asleep, the demon Kalaketu, who in the guise of a boar had waylaid Pratapabhanu, appeared before the anchorite, his friend, in the cave and together they hatched a plot. Through kalaketu's 'Maya' (illusive powers) the sleeping Pratapabhanu and his horse were carried to the Palace, the former was laid beside the sleeping Queen in the bed room and the latter in the royal stables. He also lifted the royal family priest, deprived him of his senses, imprisoned him in a mountain cave and himself assumed the form of the Palace priest. Pratapabhanu woke up in the morning and was amazed to find himself in the palace. He quietly left very early unperceived even by the Queen and returned by about noon so as to convince everyone that he, having left a day earlier, had on his own returned safely. After four days, at the

appointed time, the anchorite arrived. The King was pleased. He invited a large number of Brahmins and their families on a religious ceremony, and made suitable arrangements so that the food cooked by the anchorite could be served to all of them. The food amongst other things consisted of animal and human flesh cooked with various dishes. When the King served the food, the demon Kalaketu disguisting as the royal priest created a false 'Akash Vani' (Divine Voice) which warned the Brahmins not to taste the food as it contained animal and human flesh. The King was stunned and al the Brahmins rose up in disgust. They cursed the King that within a year he would perish along with his entire family. Thereafter, the wily anchorite sent messages to all the defeated kings and they organized combined attack on King pratapabhanu and he along with his family perished as per the curse. He was later born as a Demon with ten heads and twenty arms and was named Ravana. The King's younger brother Arimardana was born as Kumbhakarna, King's sons and servants were born as fierce demons in Ravana's family.

Ravana created terror everywhere so much so that even 'Devtas' were in distress. They along with the mother Earth went to Brahma and conveyed Ravana's nuisance. He expressed His helplessness and they all meditated on Lord Vishnu when a heavenly voice descended and said, "I shall descend on the Earth in 'Surya Vansh'. Kapil Muni and Aditi, who did a lot of penance, are reborn in the city of Ayodhya as King Dashratha and Kaushalya. In that house shall I take birth in the form of four brothers. I shall descend with My Supreme Energy and shall relieve the Earth of its burden. Therefore, do not fear. " Brahma

Brahma instructed the Gods to take birth on the Earth in the form of monkeys and adore the feet of Shri Hari.

Shri Rama's descent in Human Form

King Dashratha had three consorts Kaushalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. They were all holy, humble and devoted to the King and loved each other much. The King longed to have a son. He once went to Guru Vasishtha, his preceptor and expressed his desire to have a son. The Guru told him that he would not have one but four sons. The Guru went to Sage Shringi and requested him to perform a sacrifice so that the King was blessed with son. He felt honoured and readily agreed to perform 'Putra Kamekshi Yagya'. As the sacrifice was in progress, the Lord of Agni appeared holding a bowl of 'Kheer' (rice boiled in milk with sugar) and offered it to the King and advised him to give the same to his consorts to eat. He did accordingly and after sometime all the Queens conceived. Kaushalya gave birth to Shri Rama on an astrologically the most auspicious day of 'Chaitra Shukla Naumi' (bright half of Chaitra) at noon. All 'Devtas' were happy to learn about this news and showered flowers from Heaven. At the time of birth, Shri Rama appeared before Kaushalya in the form of Vishnu with four arms. The mother, though happy, requested Him to appear in the usual child form to fulfill her motherly desire of breast feeding a baby. He did so and let out His first cry. Lord Shiva told Uma while narrating Shri Rama's story that He and Kaka Bhushandi were there in an incognito form to see Shri Rama's descent on Earth.

Queen Kaikeyi gave birth to a son and Queen Sumitra got two sons. The 'Namakarn' (nameing the child) ceremony was performed by Guru Vasishtha and the four sons were named Shri Rama, Bharata, Laxmana and Shatrughna.

Shri Rama gives another surprise to Kaushalya

Once Kaushalya gave Shri Rama a bath and placed Him in His cradle. After having a bath herself she went to worship Lord Vishnu and offered some food to the Lord and went to the kitchen. After a little while she again returned to the place of worship and found that Shri Rama was eating the food she had offered to the Lord. She was astonished and went to see if Shri Rama had crawled out of the cradle. To her surprise she found Him sleeping in the cradle. Coming back to the place of worship she again found Shri Rama eating the food. Shri Rama, seeing His mother perplexed, gently smiled. He then revealed to His mother His infinite form consisting of countless Suns and Moons, mountains, oceans, rivers, plains and woods, Brahma, Lord Shiva and other Gods and Deities etc. She closed her eyes and bowed at the Lord's feet. Seeing His mother frightened, He again assumed His child form and told her not to reveal this fact to anyone.

The up-bringing of four brothers

After passing the stage of infancy, the preceptor performed the tonsure ceremony (Chudakaran) of all the four brothers and when they attained boyhood their thread ceremony (Yagneopavit) was performed. They were all playful from their childhood and King Dashratha and his

Queens enjoyed watching them play. They endeared themselves to the people of Ayodhya (Kaushalpur) be it men and women, young and old. Shri Rama would wake up early and the first thing He would do was to bow to His parents and preceptor. He would then wake up His brothers. They would go to the forest for a hunt everyday. Shri Rama would listen to Vedas and Puranas with rapt attention and would explain the details to His younger brothers.

<u>Sage Vishwamitra takes Shri Rama and Laxmana for killing demons</u>

The enlightened Sage Vishwamitra lived in a forest. In his hermitage a number of Rishis, Munis and other holy people would participate in the performance of 'japa' and sacrifices which was a regular feature. Marichi and Subahu were two demons who would repeatedly cause disturbance in their 'japa' and desecrate the sacrifice. He knew that these demons could only be disposed off by Shri Hari who had taken birth at King Dashratha's Palace in order to relieve the Earth of its burden. He went to Ayodhya and called on King Dashratha. As he met the King, the latter fell prostrate before the hermit. Having been greeted by the King reverently, Vishwamitra told Dashratha that demons were creating a lot of nuisance for him and other Rishis and Munis in his hermitage. He would like to have Shri Rama and Laxmana with him for exterminating all these demons. The King could not entertain the idea of leaving his dearest children even for a short while and that too for fighting demons. Vishwamitra assured the King that this would bring merit to him and blessings to the children but King Dashratha refused to

entrust his beloved children to him. It was only after intense pleading by Vasishtha that Shri Rama and Laxmana were allowed to join Sage Vishwamitra. When they were on their way to the hermitage in the thick forests, demoness Tadaka rushed in fury to kill them. Shri Rama took her life with a single arrow. At the hermitage, Vishwamitra tauhght Him may sacred formulae which armed Him with unequalled strength to endure hunger, thirst and face any foe.

On an auspicious day, Vishwamitra and other Sages commenced the sacrifice and Shri Rama and Laxmana kept guarding against demons. As the oblations were in progress, an army of demons led by Marichi and Subahu came to desecrate the sacrifice. As Shri Rama noticed Marichi coming, He shot a headless arrow and flung him a long distance away into the sea. When Subahu came charging on them He shot an arrow of fire at him and killed him in no time. Meanwhile Laxmana exterminated their army completely with his arrows. Having got rid of their foes, the Sages could perform their sacrifices peacefully and without disruption.

Ahalya reappears from a stone slab

One day Sage Vishwamitra received an invitation from King Videha to grace the occasion of his daughter's 'Svayamvara' by his presence. So Sage Vishwamitra set out with Shri Rama and Laxmana in the forest. En route they came across a large slab of stone. The Sage told them that Ahalya, the consort of Seer Gautama had been transformed into a stone under the curse of her husband and she could be restored only by the dust of

Shri Rama's feet. Shri Rama touched the stone with His feet and Ahalya appeared in full blood and bloom. She touched Shri Rama's feet, recognized Him as Lord Hari and went to the abode of her consort.

Worship of Mother Ganga

Proceeding onwards, they reached the banks of River Ganges (Holy Ganga). The Sage narrated the legend of how the celestial stream descended to the Earth. They worshipped the Mother Ganga.

Arrival in Janakpuri

Proceeding further they could see from far the beautiful city of Janakpuri. The magnificent Palaces, beautiful houses, trees, roads, streams, wells, birds, lotuses, gardens, flowers, orchards, groves, blossoms, fruits, etc. presented a splendid landscape. In the Palaces lived King Videha who had a beautiful daughter named Sita.

Sage Vishwamitra, Shri Rama and Laxmana stayed in an orchard nearby. As soon as King Videha (Janaka) was informed about the arrival of the Sage, he came along with his family preceptor Satananda and others to greet him. The King prostrated before the Sage and received his blessings. Sage Vishwamitra seated him beside himself. After a while the two Princes who had gone to see a garden nearby returned. As soon as King Janaka saw them his heart was filled with joy. Praising the boys, the King enquired as to who they were. The Seer told him that they were the able sons of King

Dashratha, the jewels of Raghu's race, having been sent by their father to enable him to conduct the sacrifices and other ceremonies smoothly and without impediments under constant heart of demons. He introduced them as Shri Rama and Laxmana, both being embodiments of beauty, virtue, strength and power. While admiring Shri Rama he recounted His feat of havingkilled demoness Tadaka, vanquished demons Marichi and Subahu and restored Ahalya.

Thereafter Sage Vishwamitra and the Princes stayed in a special hut as guests of King Janaka. When they went round the city, the people of Janakpuri thronged to have a glimpse of the charming Princes. Beholding both of them they got the utmost pleasure and attained the consummation of their eyes. Some even remarked that Shri Rama, the elder brother, would be the best bridegroom for Princess Janaki (Sita) whose 'Svayamvara' (bow sacrifice) was to be held. They wished that King Janaka should marry Her straightaway to Him notwithstanding his vow to hold the 'Svayamvara'. Going through the city, the two Princes also saw the arena where the 'Svayamvara' was to be held.

The next morning as they went round the garden to collect flowers for Vishwamitra's morning prayers, Princess Janaki also chanced to visit the temple of 'Girija' in the same garden along with Her companions. She was sent by Her mother Sunaina to worship Mother Girija so that She would be blessed with a nice and noble husband worthy of Her in the 'Svayamvara'. One of Her companions saw the two charming Princes. She informed Janaki that she had just seen the two Princes with unparalleled beauty who had captivated the heart of everyone in the

town by their charming looks and were being much talked about. Her works of praise for them aroused immense curiosity in Her mind to have their glimpse. Hiding Herself behing the flower bushes, Janaki saw shri Rama and Laxmana. Suddenly Shri Rama turned His head and caught singh of Janaki. They beheld each other with unwinking eyes and were enthralled from within in appreciation of each other's grace, beauty and charm. Shri Rama told Laxmana that She was Janaka's daughter Sita for whom bow sacrifice was being held. Sita along with Her companions went inside the temple to pray. Sita's humble and earnest prayer to the Goddess filled Mother Giriji's heart with delight and Sita heard the Divine Voice that Her heart's desire shall be fulfilled.

Shri Rama and Laxmana returned to Guru Vishwamitra with a basketful of flowers for his prayers. Shri Rama told the Guru all that they had seen in the garden. Sage Vishwamitra offered his prayers and blessed the two brothers wishing them accomplishment of their desires.

Shri Rama joins 'Svayamvara'

Laxmana started prompting Shri Rama to participate in the 'Svayamvara' ceremony and break the bow which none other than His mighty arms were capable of. While he was persuading Shri Rama, Guru Satananda was sent by King Janaka to invite Guru Vishwamitra to attend the 'Svayamvara' ceremony along with the two Princes.

The arena of the bow sacrifice was well decorated and many Kings, Princes and others with strong muscles

had already occupied their seats. As Guru Vishwamitra and the two Princes arrived, they were received with due honour and dseated on a separate rostrum. People *en route and those who had assembled at the arena were delighted to see the two Princes. Genuine Kings, demons disguised as Kings through their charm and many others participating in the bow sacrifice looked at Shri Rama with awe as if He were their Death Sentinel. A fear of sure defeat in the sacrifice agitated their minds even though outwardly the princes looked Just like tender doys.

At an auspicious moment decided by King Janaka, Sita was ushered in accompanied by Her beautiful friends. She looked an embodiment of charm and excellence. Her beauty defied all description. She was seated in a special enclosure with Her mother and Her companions sat behind Her. She looked around the vast assemblage in the arena and spotted Shri Rama sitting with His brother and Guru on a special rostrum and was not only pleased but held Him in Her heart praying that He alone should come out successful in the sacrifice and fulfill Her father's pledge.

King Janaka's proclamation was announced and the bow sacrifice commenced. Though most of the aspirants had a lot of muscle power, but many of them knew that the bow was very heavy and that it would be very difficult for them even to push it. Ravana and Banasur quietly slipped away as soon as they saw the bow. Other kings came one by one, tried to lift the bow but could not even move it. When many kings had tried their luck and returned to their seats defeated and disappointed,

Sunaina felt that King Janaka had done a big mistake in setting such a difficult condition for her daughter's marriage. She shivered at the prospect of Sita remaining unmarried throughout Her life as no one would be able to even lift the bow. King Janaka was also utterly disappointed and commented that Brahma presumably had not created a man who could lift the bow to tie its string and prove himself to be a worthy match for his daughter Sita.

Shri Rama breaks the bow

These words of King Janaka greatly upset Laxmana who stood up hurriedly and without waiting for his brother's and Guru's permission said that nobody could speak such words in an assembly where anyone of Raghu's race was present. He said, "If I had Shri Rama's permission I could lift the entire world like a ball. It was no job for me to lift the bow and run with it for a long distance." This statement of Laxmana surprised the kings present in the assembly. Though King Janaka blushed, Sita was happy in the heart of Her hearts. Shri Rama checked Laxmana from speaking further and asked him to resume his seat. Guru Vishwamitra was watching all this with a smile. It being a propitious moment, he asked Shri Rama to stand up and go to lift the bow and relieve King Janaka of his anguish. Shri Rama bowed to him respectfully and walked majestically to the place where the bow was placed. He looked around and saw Sita looking anxiously at Him, waiting for Him to come and praying earnestly that He alone should break the bow and fulfill Her father's vow to win Her. He looked at Guru Vishwamitra, bowed to him again and in all

swiftness not only lifted the bow but in an instant broke it as He tried to tie its string. As the bow broke with a bang, the loud and awful sound produced by it reverberated through all Spheres. Guru Vishwamitra and Laxmana felt a thrill of joy and so did King Janaka, his wife Sunaina, others and above all Sita Herself who was throughout praying Lord Ganesha and Goddess Girija to grant Her the innermost desire to marry Shri Rama. Gods rained flowers on Shri Rama whilst all other aspirants who had unsuccessfully attempted to lift the bow shrank in their seats in shame and disgust.

Sita garlands Shri Rama

Satananda went to Janaki and prompted Her to garland Shri Rama and accept Him as Her spouse on fulfillment of the condition imposed by Her father. She gracefully stepped forward and was escorted towards Him by Her companions who sang melodious songs in praise of Shri Rama. As She garlanded Shri Rama, flowers rained on Them from the Heaven. (It is said that Shri Rama was taller than Sita. Shri Rama felt that it may be difficult for Sita to place the garland round His neck unless He bends forward considerably. He looked towards Laxmana who understood what His brother was thinking. Laxmana who supports the entire universe on His head, raised Sita through His 'Maya' without anyone noticing it and She conveniently garlanded Shri Rama with the 'Jaimala'. Sita's friends told Her to bow and clasp Shri Rama's feet. But Sita was afraid to touch Them as She had heard that Shri Rama had touched a stone with His feet and it regained its original form of

Sati Ahalya (Rishi Gautama's spouse). Shri Rama could perceive Her transcendental love and smiled to Himself.

Parshurama's fury

Some of the Kings and demons present in the arena, who could not bear Shri Rama taking Sita as His wife, got indignant and threatened to catch the two Princes and kidnap Sita. This alarmed Laxmana. Taking bow in his hand he challenged that should anyone step forward he would shower his deadly arrows and tear him into smithereens. King Janaka reprimanded the kings dejected by defeat and shouted shame on them. While this commotion was going on, Sage Parshurama walked in, furious as he was to see Lord Shiva's bow lying broken into two pieces. There was complete silence and King Janaka, Sage Vishwamitra and all those present there rose from their seats and paid him respect. Shri Rama and Sita also bowed to him and he blessed them both. Though he had a saintly look but everybody held him in awe as he had a cruel record of deeds attached to him. Parshurama is Sage Jamadagni's son. It is said that at the behest of his father he even killed his own mother for returning late from the river. She was later restored by her husband at the request of his son. At yet another occasion Sage Jamadagni was slain by King Sahasrabahu's men after Parshurama had killed the King. To avenge his father's death, Parshurama retaliated by not only killing descendants of Sahasrabahu but also wiping out the whole 'Kshatriya' race from the Earth thirty two times. Parshurama enquired as to who had broken the bow. He said that he who had done it was his

greatest enemy and he would finish with him. Parshuram's scornful words infuriated Laxmana and he picked up an argument with him. A heated exchange of words took place between them. As they were short of sttacking each other, Shri Rama intervened and gently asked Sage Parshurama to calm down considering that Laxmana was only a young boy and need be pardoned. He said that if breaking Shiva's bow called for a serious punishable offence, then He was ready to meet any punishment for being Himself responsible for it. When there was no end to the pungent words of Parshurama, Shri Rama politely said to him, "I am only Rama but you are parshurama with nine sacred threads (the Brahmanical cord). As such I am inferior to you. " Inspite of this Parshurama did not perceive Shri Rama and went on shouting at Him and His younger brother Laxman. Shri Rama was left with no option but to warn him that in accordance with the traditions of Raghu's race and being a 'Kshatriya' He was prepared to meet him in fight, if circumstances so demanded, even if it may mean death for Him. At the same time He told him that the glory of the Brahmin race is Such that one who reveres them and does not oppose them is rid of all fears. Parshurama got disillusioned and told Shri Rama if He could draw the bow from His hand. Lo and behold, to Parshurama's amazement, the bow passed on of its own accord from his hands to Shri Rama as he stretched forward to hand it over to Him. It was then he recollected the words of Lord Vishnu and recognized Shri Rama. He repented for having lost his temper and folded his hands before Shri Rama in submission. He started singing in His praise and asked Shri Rama to take away his pride, ignorance, passion and goodness. (Lord Vishnu had once given the bow to

Parshurama saying that when He would descend on Earth as Shri Rama it would of its own accord pass on into His hands as he would have fulfilled the mission of his life.) Parshurama blessed Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana and left. With Parshurama's departure from the arena, the foolish kings and demons, who revolted and attempted to kidnap Sita mistaking Shri Rama and Laxmana as fugitives, took to their heels in different directions.

Message to Ayodhya

Sita and Her parents felt much relieved and cheerful as the 'Svayamvara' ceremony concluded in a happy note. Singing and rejoicing in their family commenced in anticipation of the forthcoming marriage ceremony. Thereafter, Guru Vishwamitra told King Janaka, "Though Sita's marriage with Shri Rama has been ordained with the breaking of the bow but all the same it has to be performed in accordance with family traditions and Vedic pronouncements. You must send a messenger to King Dashratha at Ayodhya and request him to come with the marriage procession (barat) so that the formal wedding ceremony of Shri Rama and Sita could be performed with gaiety and grandeur." King Janaka promptly deputed his special messenger to Ayodhya for this important assignment. He also called leading citizens of the city and instructed them to beautify the city, decorate all markets, paint all houses and temples and make all the necessary arrangements for according grand reception to the marriage procession from Ayodhya.

The messenger was well received in Ayodhya and brought to the court with due honour where King

Dashratha promptly gave him an audience. The missive was handed over to King Dashratha. Absorbed in the thought of Shri Rama and Laxmana, tears rolled down King Dashratha's eyes. He took time to compose himself to enquire about the welfare of his sons and Sage Vishwamitra. He read out the letter and the whole court besides Bharata and Shatrughna rejoiced on hearing about its contents. The messenger gave a detailed account of the 'Savayamvara' ceremony, Shri Rama's breaking the bow without effort, Parshurama's sudden appearance on the scene and the garlanding of Shri Rama by Sita. Thereafter Dashratha went along with the messenger to his preceptor Sage Vasishtha, gave him the letter and related in detail the sequence of events at Janakpuri. Sage Vasishtha was highly pleased and remarked that the world abounds in happiness only to a virtuous man. The Sage advised him to prepare the 'barat' and proceed quickly. Dashratha then informed the three Quickly. Dashratha then informaed the three Queens. Infinitely pleased, they made lots of offerings to Brahmins, etc.

King Dashratha leaves with the 'barat'

Announcement of the happy news was made in the city by drum beaters. The city of Ayodhya was decorated abundantly, and it wore a splendid look. Bharata arranged elephants, horses, donkeys, bullock carts, chariots, etc. for the 'baratis' and their luggage. Mounted on chariots etc. the people started assembling for the marriage procession. Two special chariots were arranged, one for King Dashratha and the other for Sage Vasishtha. As the 'barat' set forth there was great

rejoicing amidst beating of kettle drums and ringing of bells dangling on camels etc. Dashratha's thoughts were, however, immersed on Lord Shiva, Guru Vasishtha, Goddess Gauri and Lord Ganesha. Good omens occurred as the 'barat' set forth. A blue necked Jay (bird) picked up food on the left, a crow and a mongoose were seen by everybody on the right, a blessed woman appeared with a pitcher and a child in her arms, a fox turned round and Showed himself again and again, a cow suckled its calf in front of the procession, a herd of deer came round to the right, a 'Shyama' bird was observed on an auspicious tree to the left, a man bearing curds and fish and two learned Brahmins with a book in their hands came from the opposite direction. All these omens foretold a happy reunion and gay days ahead for the 'baratis'.

<u>Reception of 'barat' at Janakpuri</u>

As the 'barat' reached Janakpuri, they were given a warm welcome and served milk, juices, cold water, fruits, etc. They were also presented with ornaments, wearing apparels, gems etc. They were also served sumptuous food and other delicacies before retiring to their places of stay. People of Ayodhya were thrilled to see the gorgeous marriage procession and the 'baratis' were fully satisfied with the hospitality shown to them.

When Sita learned about the arrival of 'barat', She summoned all the 'Siddhis' (miraculous powers personified) through meditation and sent them to serve the 'baratis'. They all rushed to various apartments to entertain the guests and lend them comfort.

Only Shri Rama could recognize them and perceive that they were obeying orders of Sita by virtue of tremendous power of devotion that She commanded.

Shri Rama and Laxmana, happy as they were on the arrival of 'barat', lost no time to call at Guru Vishwamitra. They shied to tell him that they wanted to see their father, brothers and others in the 'barat', but the Guru smelt what they had in their mind and himself led them to King Dashratha. On seeing Vishwamitra coming, Dashratha bowed to him. Shri Rama and Laxmana bowed to their father who clasped them hard. They, then bowed to Guru Vasishtha. Bharata and Shatrughna paid obeisance to Guru Vishwamitra. They also met ShriRama, bowed to Him and hugged Laxmana jubilantly. Shri Rama also met others in the 'barat' and was commended by them.

The 'barat' had reached Janakpuri one day before the date of wedding. The residents of Janakpuri were charmed by the sight of Shri Rama and Laxmana. They were happy in their hearts that they would have a chance to see them again whenever they visit Janakpuri after marriage. Some of the friends of Sita who had seen Bharata and Shatrughna with the 'barat', went to report their beauty and elegance to Her. They told Her that while Bharata resembled Shri Rama, Shatrughna looked very much like Laxmana. They prayed to God that all the four brothers be married in their city only.

Wedding ceremony

At an auspicious hour, selected by Guru Vasishtha, the 'barat' was taken with a lot of rejoicing and fanfare to King Janaka's Palace. Lord Shiva summoned all the gods and informed them that Shri Rama's wedding was being performed. The gods beheld King Dashratha at the head of the 'barat' and advancing towards King Janaka. Lord Shiva summoned His Nandi Bull and set forth for Janakpuri along with Uma. They gazed again and again on Shri Rama's charming beauty. Lord Vishnu as well as Brahma arrived with Their consorts and They were all delighted to see Shri Rama. Lord Shiva who bears five heads with three eyes each, Brahma with His eight eyes and Vishnu were all delightfully watching Shri Rama as the groom. Parvati, Saraswati and Lakshmi went to the feminine chamber to see Sita who looked equally beautiful and charming as a bride. They wished to have more eyes and more time to see Shri Rama and Sita. It is only Shri Rama and Sita and nobody else who could recognize Them, as They had come in the form of Brahmin men and women in beautiful robes to get mixed with the crowd and pass unnoticed.

The wedding was performed amidst chanting of the Vedic 'mantras' and in accordance with family customs by Sages Vasishtha and Satananda. The five kinds of music (Vina, clapping of hands, cymbals, kettle-drums and blowing of trumpets) were played and damsels sang happy songs. King Janaka personally conducted King Dashratha to the 'mandap' and they paid obeisance to Sages Vasishtha, Vishwamitra and Vamdeva. As the oblations were being offered to the sacred fire, the Agni Devta received the offerings with delight. After the

ceremony was over, the bridegroom and the bride were seated together on a specially prepared seat. Everyone present there was delighted to see them. Sage Vasishtha asked king Janaka to bring Mandavi, Shrutikirti and Urmila to the 'mandap'. They all came dressed beautifully as brides. Mandavi, daughter of Kushaketu (also called Kushadwaja) younger brother of King Janaka, was married to Bharata, Urmila, the younger sister of Sita was married to Laxmana and the youngest Shrutikirti was married to Shatrughna. Their marriage was performed amidst chanting of the Vedic 'mantras' and observing of the family costoms. All the four grooms and their brides looked graceful and shone forth as though the four states of consciousness (viz. wakefulness, dream, sound sleep and absorption into Brahma) with the phase of the soul presiding over each gleamed all at once in the heart of an individual.

At the request of King Janaka, the 'baratis' stayed longer than usual at Janakpuri and were very well looked after. Different types of dishes were served at each meal. Some could be directly swallowed, some needed mastication before gulping, some could be licked and others could be sipped. At each meal five initial morsels were taken as an oblation for five vital airs (Pranaye Swaha, Apanaye Swaha, Vyanaye Swaha and Samanaye Swaha : these are known as 'Panchkor').

Return of the 'barat' to Ayodhya

After many days had passed, Vishwamitra and Satananda told King Janaka that the 'barat' should return. Arrangements were accordingly made not only at Janakpuri before departure but also en route at each place of halt. The brides were seen off by King Janaka, Sunaina, other family members and their friends etc. The 'barat' left Janakpuri and entered Ayodhya at the auspicious hour chosen by the family preceptors. Besides the chariots, carts, horses, elephants etc. that they had brought with them from Ayodhya, they also took with them a lot many more presented by King Janaka, each laden with dowry by way of gold, ornaments, jewels, clothing, and many other precious items.

As they entered Ayodhya, King Dashratha fixed his mind on Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvati and Lord Ganesha. The beating of drums gave sufficient indication to the residents of the city that the 'barat' had returned. They started collecting en route, on their terraces and the roof of their houses to have a clear view and welcome the Princes, their brides and other members of the 'barat'. When they arrived at the Palace, the three Queens Kaushalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra, delighted as they were, welcomed the Princes and their brides with 'aarti' (waving lights), showered flowers on them and adorned them with more ornaments, jewels etc. In accordance with Vedic rituals and family customs, the Princes and their brides were led into the Palace by the mothers earnestly praying in their mind for the welfare of their children and the brides. While all this was being done, Shri Rama smiled to Himself, perceiving the ecstasy and merriment of the

occasion. The Gods were also watching unseen and they offered their blessings to Shri Rama and Sita.

King Dashratha called the 'baratis' and gifted them carts, ornaments, clothes, etc. and they left for their homes. Then he came inside the Palace and sat among the Queens, brides and the sons. He related to the Queens all that happened at Janakpuri. Later the mothers carried Shri Rama to His bedroom. Kaushalya while pressing lovingly His limbs asked Shri Rama as to how He had killed Tadaka, Marichi, Subahu, how Ahalya had emerged from the stone and how He broke Lord Shiva's bow. Shri Rama told her that it was all due to the grace of Vishwamitra. Then Shri Rama told His brothers to retire to their bedrooms.

In the morning Shri Rama woke up at 'Brahma-muharat' (the holy hour). His brothers also followed suit. They went to the Palace gate to wish the Brahmins who had assembled to pay obeisance to the King and the Princes. They also bowed to Gods, their preceptor and parents. After performing their usual morning chore they went for a bath in the river Saryu. Then they had their usual morning prayers and called on their father, King Dashratha, in his court where they were welcomed and seated appropriately. As Vishwamitra and Vasishtha entered the court the four brothers and their father clasped their feet and adored them. Sage Vasishtha narrated several legends and all listened with rapt attention.

On an auspicious day, the sacred strings, tied on the wrist of the Princes and their brides and the time of

their marriage, were untied amidst rejoicing. (Such strings are tied round the wrists of bride, groom and all others who are present at such and other auspicious ceremonies to ward off evil.) Sage Vishwamitra who desired to leave for his hermitage, was seen off by the King, the Queens, the Princes and their consorts and many others with due reverence.

End of Bala Kanda

Thus, comes to an end the "Bala Kanda", the first descent of Ramacharitamanasa. Sant Tulsidas says while closing this descent :

"Those men and women who reverently hear or lovingly sing the story of Shri Rama's marriage with Sita shall ever be happy by the grace of Shri Rama and Sita, as Shri Rama's glory is a treasure house of happiness."

*** End of Descent 1 ***

DESCENT - 2

(AYODHYA KANDA)

"Sanuj Seey samet Prabhu rajat paran kutir,
Bhagti Gyanu Bairagya janu sohat dharen sarir."

..... (Shri Ramacharitamanasa, Descent - II/321)

(With Sita and His younger brother (Laxmana) the Lord shone forth in His hut of leaves. It seemed as if Bhakti (Devotion), Vairagya (Dispassion) and Gyana (Wisdom) had appeared in flesh and blood spreading brilliance.)

Shri Rama's coronation as Regent

Ever since the arrival of Sita and the return of Shri Rama, there was peace and prosperity everywhere in Ayodhya. Everyone was happy. King Dashratha and his Queens were feeling on top of the world. The people of Ayodhya had an earnest desire that King Dashratha should in his own time appoint Shri Rama as his regent. One day, while King Dashratha was looking in a mirror, he found some gray hair on his head. It occurred to him that apparently he had grown old and the time to

appoint Shri Rama as the regent and successor to the throne had arrived. He called at Sage Vasishtha to seek his advice regarding the thought that had crept in his mind. The Sage was delighted to hear from the King what he himself wanted to suggest to him and readily gave his consent. He told him that those who adore Shri Rama have all their hearts' agony soothed. The King Summoned, all his cousellors including Sumantra their Chief, and asked them whether they favoured his proposal of coronation of Shri Rama. They all praised the King for putting forth such a delightful prospsal which was acceptable to all. Sumantra was assigned the responsibility of making all the arrangements for the coronation in consultation with Sage Vasishtha.

The people of Ayodhya were filled with joy to learn about Shri Rama's coronation as regent. The preparations for the ceremony started in full swing. Water from holy places was collected. Good omens manifested themselves in the person of Shri Rama and Sita, including throbbing of their limbs. They were getting restless regarding Bharata's return who had gone to his maternal home along with Shatrughna. Shri Rama could not bear his separation for long and that too when such a big occasion was round the corner. Kaushalya held prayers for accomplishment of Dashratha's desire. The King told the Sage to inform Shri Rama and impart appropriate advice to Him. As Shri Rama saw the Sage walking into His apartment He ran to the door to greet him and respectfully bowed at his feet. He told the Sage that he should have instead called Him to his hermitage. The Sage said to Him, "The King has made all arrangements for your installation as the Regent of Ayodhya. You should

observe religious austerity viz. fast etc. so that the ceremony is brought to a happy conclusion." He also apprised Him of His added responsibilities and gave other appropriate advice to Shri Rama. As the Sage left, Shri Rama felt somewhat uneasy in His heart and thought that all the brothers were born roughly at the same time. They played, dined, slept and grew up simultaneously. Their ears were pierced, their sacred thread and wedding ceremony were performed at the same time. Then how come He was being installed as the regent. He knew that it was a family tradition to install the eldest son on the throne but He felt Bharata equally deserved to be the regent as he possessed all the requisite qualities and was also not much younger to Him.

Mother Saraswati perverts Manthra

As the preparations for the coronation ceremony were in full swing and people of Ayodhya were rejoicing, the Gods in Heaven got restless. They wanted Shri Rama to relinquish His throne and retire to the forests for the accomplishment of Their objective of getting rid of demons who had become a big menace to peaceful living of the Sages, Rishis and pious people engaged in religious sacrifices and others devoted to God and leading a virtuous life upholding 'Dharma'. They, therefore, invoked Mother Sharada (Saraswati) and bowing at Her feet, They requested Her to go to Ayodhya for the sake of Gods and cast such a spell in the minds of people over there and create such conditions in Ayodhya that somehow the coronation ceremony is withheld and instead Shri Rama

is sent to the forests. The Mother Goddess did not agree at first but on being implored repeatedly She gave Her consent and went to Ayodhya. She looked for a person who did not hold Shri Rama most dearly. The only person She came across was Manthra, the dull - witted hump-backed maid servant of Kaikeyi. Mother Sharada bestowed on her sharp wit and convincing power and returned to Her abode.

Manthra perverts Kaikeyi

Manthra noticed jubilations amongst people of Ayodhya and decorations being done in the streets and out of curiosity enquired as to what occasion they were preparing for. When she learnt what it was all about, she felt very sad and went straight to Kaikeyi wearing a long face. Kaikeyi asked her why she looked sad but got no reply. On being prompted again she burst out at Kaikeyi (who loved her a lot as she had served her ever since her childhood). She told her that the King had connived to install Shri Rama as the Regent the following day. She said that all this had been deceitfully planned by Kaushalya who intended to dominate after Shri Rama was made the Regent. Though Kaikeyi explained her that the customs and traditions of Raghu's race provided for the eldest son to be installed as the Regent yet nothing could convince the wicked lady. Manthra argued that unless there was something fishy about it why all this was being done in haste while Bharata was away. She asked her why could the King not wait for his return? She went on saying that her heart would break once she sees her mistress (Kaikeyi) rendered wretched by clever, deceitful and crafty Kaushalya, who wanted to hurry

through the coronation ceremony in the absence of Bharata. Recounting many harrowing stories of Co-wives she somehow put Kaikeyi's mind off balance. Having been swayed completely by Manthra's craft, Kaikeyi remembered that her right eye was wnking (which is not considered a good omen) and that she frequently had nightmares for past so many days in sucession. She took it as a divine warning and got thoroughly convinced with Manthra's words. She told Manthra that she would never like to be dependent on and dominated by anyone and would never submit to anybody's evil designs. Manthra reminded her that an astrologer, whom she had consulted earlier, had already predicted that Bharata would certainly be the King. She advised Kaikeyi to do something in order to fructify the prediction. Kaikeyi was, thus, completely won over and sought Manthra's advice to thwart the plot she thought was being hatched against her.

Kaikeyi secures two boons

Manthra, who held great affection for Bharata and clever as she had become owing to Mother Sharada, reminded Kaikeyi that the King owed her two boons. Valmiki Ramayana states that King Dashratha, during a combat with Sambara, was injured and fell unconscious in the chariot. As the charioteer had also fallen, Kaikeyi, who had accompanied the King in the combat, took control of the chariot and dexterously led the King to a safer place. She nursed him till he regained consciousness. Dashratha was glad that Kaikeyi had saved his life and promised to grant her any two boons that she would desire. She replied, "My Lord, I possess

everything and want nothing more but if you insist I shall ask for these at some other time. " The Adhyatma Ramayana which forms a part of Brahmanda purana presents a slightly different version of this story. It says that during the combat the axle of the wheel of the chariot got loosened and as it was about to come out of the axle Kaikeyi inserted her arm to prevent the chariot from toppling down till King Dashratha vanquished the foe. For this heroic feat, the King offered to give her two boons which Kaikeyi kept in reserve for future. Manthra reminded her that it was the best occasion to ask for the boons. She advised Kaikeyi to go to her Grievance Cell, remove all her jewellery and usual grand apparel, wear plain clothes and with unkempt hair lie down on the floor sulking and sobbing. She further advised her that when the King would entreat her to tell him what was wrong with her that would be the best occasion to ask of the boons. Kaikeyi did accordingly and lied down on the floor wearing black dress and with ornaments strewn all around her. She wore no make-up and looked horrible with sullen face, red eyes and loose untied hair.

King Dashratha was joyous like everyone else in Ayodhya, and came to Kaikeyi's apartment. He was shocked to find her in a miserable condition. He gently enquired of her the reason that made her look so sad at a time when everybody was cheerful. However, she did not reply and instead returned a furious glance at the King. Dashratha, who loved Kaikeyi very much, assured her repeatedly that he would do anything for her provided she revealed what had hurt her so much. Finally Kaikeyi reminded him of the two boons he owed her which he

had promised to give anytime upon her asking. Dashratha told her lovingly that he could even sacrifice his life to redeem his promise as was the tradition of Raghu's race. Inspite of this she made him swear by Shri Rama in order that he would not hesitate to grant her the boons whatever they may be. She was certain that once he swears by Shri Rama he would certainly not go back on his promise. At last she told him that the first boon she desired was that Bharata should be installed as the regent and the second was that Shri Rama should be sent to the forest to stay there for fourteen years wearing hermit's robes.

On hearing these startling words from his beloved wife, the King was filled with agony and turned pale as if life was sucked away from him. He was utterly dismayed and dumbfounded. Kaikeyi got annoyed and remarked that he had begun lamenting as if Bharata were not his son. She advised him not to shirk away from his duty in according her the boons as promised by him. Dashratha assured her that he would immediately call Bharata and Shatrughna back to Ayodhya and install Bharata as the regent to fulfill her first wish but implored her not to insist on the second boon and instead ask for something else. Kaikeyi did not relent and warned that she would end her life if Shri Rama was not sent to the forests by early morning. She emphasized that her death would bring disgrace to the King and tarnish his image.

Dashratha was caught between the love for his beloved wife Kaikeyi and his eldest son Shri Rama on the one hand, and his principles on the other hand. With a broken heart and confused mind he started beating

his forehead while muttering "Rama!" repeatedly. Soon he was rendered miserable and speechless. Kaikeyi told him to stop crying like a woman and decide fast whether to keep the promise or gave up his principles for good. She explained that life, wife, sons, home, wealth and land are considered no better than a straw compared to keeping one's word. King Dahratha, sighing with grief, told her that she would always repent for her misdeep which would always repent for her misdeed which would leave a permanent stain on her character that would never disappear till eternity. He further told her that Bharata would never covet sovereignty and that Shri Rama would ultimately rule Ayodhya and see it flourish. Stricken with anguish and repeating "Rama! Rama!" he fell on the ground and was not able to speak even a word.

Ayodhya shocked

It was early morning and the pleasant music of lute, flute and conch was being played foreboding the arrival of a historic moment for the people of Ayodhya. The ministers and others, waiting at the Palace Gate were surprised as it was getting late and the King had not turned up yet. Thinking that he might be asleep, Sumantra himself went to wake him up. When he learnt that the King was in Kaikeyi's apartment he went there and was shocked to see Dashratha lying speechless on the ground. On enquiring from Kaikeyi he was told that the King had not slept for the whole night. The King's face had turned pale and his eyes were closed and sunken. He was repeating the name of 'Rama' and saying nothing else. Sumantra went to call Shri Rama. When Shri Rama heard about His father, he immediately rushed to see

him. Seeing him in miserable condition, Shri Rama enquired about his welfare but Dashratha kept on staring blankly at Him without uttering a word. It was only Kaikeyi who told Shri Rama that the King owed her two boons. She had asked for the same as it pleased her but the agony of his love for Shri Rama, on the one hand, and not breaking the tradition of Raghu's race, on the other hand, had driven him to such a pitiable plight. Shri Rama was extremely glad to learn about the two boons from Kaikeyi. He said that He had always desired that dear Bharata should take over as the Regent because he possessed noble qualities. He said that His stay in the forests would be blessing in disguise for Him. In the forests, He would come across great Sages and a chance to seek their blessings. Moreover, He would not have to shoulder any responsibilities and would be able to spend His time praying to God. Shri Rama, pressing the feet of His father, requested him to stand up, grant the two boons to Mother Kaikeyi and permit Him to leave forthwith for the forests.

This news spread like a flash in Ayodhya where people were getting ready to witness the ceremony of Shri Rama's installation as the Regent. People started blaming Kaikeyi for her wickedness. Kaikeyi's close friends pleaded to her one by one to reconsider the two boons asked for, but wicked as she had become, she did not condescend to their wishes. These women left in disgust calling her a dull-witted lady.

Shri Rama takes leave of Kaushalya

Shri Rama went to His mother Kaushalya and informed her that He was leaving for the forests to dwell there for fourteen years like a hermit. Having been busy since early morning in preparing for His installation ceremony, she was taken aback. She enquired as to why Kaikeyi had given Him such a punishment for no fault of His. Kaushalya always looked upon Bharata as her own son, and therefore, did not object if Bharata was made the Regent but would not bear Shri Rama's separation. However, wise sense prevailed on her and she realized the gravity and complexity of the situation. Finally advising Shri Rama that father's command is the most sacred of all the obligations, she gave Him the permission to proceed to the forests and save the honour of His father.

Sita insists on joining Shri Rama

Sita, on hearing the news, went to Kaushalya and sought her permission to accompany Shri Rama. She was repeatedly advised to stay back and cautioned against the difficulties and dangers of living in forests. However, She considered it Her utmost duty to accompany Shri Rama. She said, "For a woman there is no calamity greater than being torn away from her beloved. In such an event, even Heaven turns into Hell for her. All her luxuries or love from her parents, kith and kins carry absolutely no charm in the absence of her husband." She pleaded before Shri Rama to allow Her to accompany Him. Seeing Her firm resolve to serve Her husband, Kaushalya was left with no choice but to grant Her permission to accompany Shri Rama to the frorests.

Laxmana insists on joining Shri Rama

When Laxmana heard that Shri Rama and Sita were ready to leave for fourteen years long exile, he came fretting and fuming to Shri Rama and fell at His feet. Shri Rama consoled and advised him to calm down and stay back to serve the King, the mothers, the preceptor and all others. Shri Rama told him, "People of Ayodhya will be pained if you do not stay back while I am away." But Laxmana was in tears and told Him that He could not live without Him even for a moment and insisted to join Him. When Shri Rama agreed, Laxmana went to seek blessings and permission from his mother Sumitra. She was very happy to learn that Laxmana, her son, had decided to join Shri Rama. She advised him to regard Shri Rama and Sita as his father and mother respectively, serve them faithfully, get for them roots and fruits to eat, keep awake at night, be on guard while They slept and always obey Them.

Dashratha's shock increases

All citizens of Ayodhya were sad and gathered at the Palace Gates. Meanwhile Shri Rama, Laxmana and Sita went to the apartment where Dashratha lay shocked and speechless. Counsellors and others were also present there. Sumantra informed the King that Shri Rama was ready to leave for the forests and Sita and Laxmana were also joining Him. This gave him a further shock and he sank deeper within himself. He could not utter even a

word. Shri Rama fell at his feet to seek his blessings. The King held Him to his bosom along with Sita and Laxmana. Shri Rama sought blessings and permission to leave and told His father to give up grief and sorrow. He reminded him that one's reputation is lost, if due to attachment, one swerves from one's duty. On hearing this the King got up, held Shri Rama's hand and said that the Sages believed Shri Rama to be the Lord of the entire creation. He said that God weighs all our actions and each one of us reaps the consequences of our actions. The King made the last bid to dissuade Shri Rama from proceeding to the forests, but realized that He being foresighted, strong - willed and champion of righteousness would never agree. He fell unconscious. The wives of Sumantra and preceptor Sage Vasishtha tried to prevail on Sita that since no one had asked Her to go to the forests, She should stay back. However, She modestly stood Her ground.

Wearing of hermit's robes

Kaikeyi, was thrilled to see Sita and Laxmana also getting ready to join Shri Rama in His exile. She thought that the coronation of Bharata would now become easier and smoother in their absence. She quickly arranged for hermit's robes for all three of them. Shri Rama accompanied by Sita and Laxmana came to Kaikeyi to take her leave. She asked them to take off all ornaments and jewellery and offered them ochre robes to change their royal dress with before departing. Shri Rama called His servants and entrusted them to the preceptor requesting him to ensure that they looked after the King during His absence. He sought a favour from the citizens

who had assembled there to console and comfort their mothers so that they did not feel the pangs of their separation.

Bowing at the feet of His preceptor, Shri Rama received his blessings and invoking Lord Ganesha, Goddess Gauri (Parvati) and Lord Shiva, He set forth along with Sita and Laxmana. There was total grief in Ayodhya but at the same time evil omens appeared in Lanka. There was, however, a mixed feeling of joy and sorrow in the abode of Gods.

Sumantra despatched for making last effort

The King woke from his unconsciousness and enquired from Sumantra if Shri Rama had left. Upon learning of their departure, he cursed his very life and wished that he should die. He told Sumantra to go in his chariot immediately, escort them to forests and return with them after a few days stay over there. He asked him to bring back at least Sita if the two brothers did not agree to return. Sumantra immediately set forth and found them at the outskirts of the city. After telling them of the King's desire to escort them to the forests, they joined him on the chariot though reluctantly. A large number of citizens of Ayodhya followed Shri Rama to the forests. Unable to bear His separation they accompanied Him right from the city. When Sumantra carried them on the chariot they continued to follow Him on foot. Having reached the banks of the Tamsa river by evening, Shri Rama proposed to have a night halt there.

Shri Rama makes citizens accompanying Him return

Shri Rama was overwhelmed with love, His people had shown on joining Him to the forests. He comforted them in many ways and advised them to return to their homes. But they did not agree. So at midnight, He whispered to Sumantra to take them away in his chariot without any noise. They mounted the chariot after invoking Lord Shiva and drove quietly. They had covered a long distance before it was morning. The people left behind in the main camp did not find their Lord when they woke up. They ran around in their search. Finding them nowhere they realized that the Lord had given them a slip to make them return to Ayodhya. They made their way home with a heavy heart.

Shri Rama offers prayers to the Mother Ganges

On reaching Shrangaverapura Shri Rama and others dismounted the chariot and prostrated before the Mother Ganges. Sita, Laxmana and Sumantra also paid obeisance to the Ganges. Shri Rama narrated lots of anecdotes connected with the Celestial River. They had a dip in the river and drank its holy water.

Nishadaraja meets Shri Rama

Nishadas were a low born tribe tracing their descent from a Brahmin through a Shudra woman. When Nishadaraja Guha was told about the arrival of Shri Rama, he along with his family and many of his tribesmen came with lots of fruits and roots to greet and serve

They wondered why Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana wore hermit's robes and not their usual princely apparel. Nishadaraja prostrated before Shri Rama, who made him sit by His side. He enquired about their welfare etc. He invited them to stay with him at Shrangaverapura but Shri Rama explained that He could not enter a village or a city as He had resolved to live like a hermit in forests for fourteen years. Shri Rama and Sita sat and slept on the ground in the open under an Ashoka tree and Laxmana stood on guard nearby holding his bow and arrow for their safety Nishadaraja also joined Laxmana. The former was distressed to see Shri Rama and Sita in the condition they were subjected to after being denied the royal comforts by the twist of fate. He remarked that Kaikeyi had acted in a foolish, cruel and mischievous manner by making Shri Rama and Sita suffer through such an ordeal.

On seeing Nishadaraja's agony, Laxmana consoled him by saying that everybody reaps the fruit of his own actions and no one else is responsible for it. He explained to him that union or separation, pleasure or pain, friend or foe, birth or death, prosperity or adversity and all illusions of world, viz. land, houses, wealth, family, heaven, hell, etc. have their roots in ignorance as nothing exists in reality. He told him not to be angry or blame someone. Yogis, who always remain in quest of the highest truth generally remain aloof. The highest spiritual goal is to be devoted to Shri Rama who is none other than God Himself, the Supreme Reality, Imperceptible, Incomparable, Beginningless, Endless, free from any change and beyond diversity who had taken a human form for the sake of His devotees. Laxmana told Guha

that he should shed all infatuation and be devoted to Shri Rama and Sita. While they were talking, it was already early morning and Shri Rama woke up. They had their usual morning chore and set forth onwards. Nishadaraja also joined them.

Sumantra returns disappointed

Sumantra requested Shri Rama to return to Ayodhya as the King had desired. When He did not agree, Sumantra fell at His feet and wept bitterly. Shri Rama advised Sumantra not to be disheartened and ensure that Ayodhya was not left without a master. He reminded him of Shibi, Dadhichi and Harishchandra who suffered lots of miseries while upholding virtue. Even Rantideva and Bali did not forsake virtue at the cost of a lot of suffering. He stressed that truthfulness is the highest virtue. He told him to convey their obeisance to His father and tell him not to feel troubled on their account. Sumantra and Shri Rama again pleaded with Sita to return and live at Ayodhya or Janakpuri as it may please Her and avoid the hardships of living in the forests. However, She did not agree, stating that She would be with Him like His shadow and could not leave Her Lord as everything else was trifle to Her. She added that the luxuries of the Palaces would not attract Her any longer. So disappointed and dejected, Sumantra resumed his return journey to Ayodhya. As he returned, even the horses of his chariot sensed Shri Rama's absence and showed reluctance to return without Him. They looked back and neighed again and again in despair.

Kevat is blessed

Having parted with Sumantra, Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana proceeded further. They reached the bank of the Ganges and had to cross over. They called for a boat. The ferry man (Kevat) told Shri Rama that he knew the secret of the dust of His feet by the touch of which a stone got transformed into Ahalya. He humbly told Him that he would allow Him to embark on his boat only after he is permitted to wash His feet. The Kevat said that he was afraid that he would lose his only means of subsistence should something happen to his boat by the touch of dust of His feet. The mysterious words of the Kevat were imbued with love. Shri Rama looked towards Sita and Laxmana in appreciation of his devotion and acceded to his request. The Kevat quickly got a wooden basin full of water and washed Shri Rama's feet with full devotion. He and his family members drank the water in which Shri Rama's feet were washed and felt immense happiness. The Kevat then seated them in his boat and ferried them across the river. While disembarking from the boat Shri Rama realized that He had nothing to pay the ferryman. He pointed to Sita but She too had no money. She, therefore, took off Her jewelled ring and offered it to the Kevat as his charges. He politely refused to accept it inspite of their insistence. Turning towards Shri Rama the Kevat said, "The fire of my wrong doings, sorrows and sins have been quenched only today and this itself has given me a handsome return for my life-long toil. I only wish that You also take me and my family across the ocean of mundane existence in our last sojourn in the same way as I ferried You across the Ganges. I need nothing more. I pray that on Your return I shall accept as a boon, whatever You give me. " Shri Rama

understood the kevat and bade him farewell after bestowing on him the boon of unalloyed devotion.

Sita offers prayer to the Mother Ganges

They bathed in the Ganges and offered their prayers. Sita made a special prayer to the Mother Ganges seeking accomplishment of Her desire that She may return safe along with Her husband and His younger brother and to offer Her worship again. The Mother Ganges answered Her prayer saying that She had been venerated and exalted by Her prayer. She blessed Sita assuring their safe return to Ayodhya.

Nishadaraja's kinsmen are sent back

Shri Rama wanted Nishadaraja and his kinsmen to return home. The latter expressed his desire to stay on with Him for some more time, show Him the way in the forests and construct a hut of leaves at the place of His choice in the forests after which he would gladly accept any order from Him. Shri Rama acceded to his request but summoned all his kinsmen, gratified them and asked them to return home and join their respective families. With a heavy heart they agreed to Him and left for Shrangaverapura.

Shri Rama at Prayagaraja

Proceeding ahead, they reached Prayagaraja, the King of holy places. This King has 'Satya' (Truth) as his minister, 'Shradha' (Piety) as his consort and 'Vanimadhvaja' (Bindhumadhva) as his friend. The confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna and the celestial Saraswati (which meets these two rivers from below its bed) is called 'Triveni'. Shri Rama explained the importance and greatness of this holy place to Sita, Laxmana and Nishadaraja Guha. They all offered prayers at the sacred place and later had a bath in it.

["Researches particularly of Dr. V.S. Wakankar reveal that the river Saraswati did exist in India and was not merely a mythological river. It actually existed and flowed from the foothills of Himalayas through what is now known as the Thar desert to the Rann of Kutch of the Arabian Sea. It dried up because its main tributary, the Sutluj changed its course approximately at right angles consequent to the geological changes. About 5000 years ago, a highly developed community with profound spiritual culture existed along the banks of the Saraswati which according to Vedas was the Mother of Rivers. The Rig Veda (II-41-16) speaks of it as the Best Mother, the best river and the best Goddess. After it dried up, the community dispersed and most of them mainly Brahmins settled in Kashmir. Later on they came to be known as Kashmiri Pandits."

..... Sh. Jagmohan, Ex-Governor J&K
in Excelsior dated 9.12.94]

Meeting with sage Bhardwaja

Sage Bhardwaja stayed at Prayaga. Shri Rama called on him and prostrated before him. The Sage held Him to his bosom and was overwhelmed with happiness to see all of them. He served them delicious fruits and roots. The Sage said that his penance and renunciation have been rewarded by His visit. He further told Him that unless one is sincerely devoted to Shri Rama in thought, word and deed one cannot dream of happiness. Shri Rama praised the Sage as a repository of all virtues. The people of Prayagaraja, ascetics, hermits, saints and others flocked at the hermitage in order to have look at the sons of King Dashratha and pay obeisance to Shri Rama, who met each one of them with love.

Onward journey through forests and villages

They stayed at Sage Bhardwaja's hermitage for the night and slept under a tree. In the morning after having a bath at Prayaga and obtaining the blessings of the Sage, they left onwards. Four religious students of the Sage accompanied them for some distance to show them the way in the forests. As they passed through villages, men and women ran to have a look at them and felt immense pleasure. An extremely charming ascetic radiating spiritual glow and devoted to Shri Rama in thought, word and deed, came running and prostrated before Shri Rama. Shri Rama raised him and held him close to His bosom. Then the ascetic prostrated before Laxmana and Sita. They also blessed him. Guha, seeing all this, prostrated before the ascetic. (The episode of this ascetic appears in some old scriptures and has been

ignored by some commertators as they did not know with certainty who the ascetic was. It is believed that he may either be Shri Hanuman or may even be a mental projection of the poet Tulsidas himself.)

Nishadaraja returns

Shri Rama felt that Nishadaraja Guha had accompanied them a long way and therefore asked him to return. Nishadaraja had no choice but to obey Shri Rama.

Onward journey towards Chitrakoot

Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana bowed to the Yamuna and started their journey onwards. People en route came to see them and pay their obeisance. The women appreciated the beauty of Sita. Seeing Her suffering from the ordeals of walking bare-footed, taking only fruits, roots and water and sleeping in the open on the ground, they wondered why at all She had come to the forests,. They wished Her well and safety in the thick and precarious forests infested with wild animals. These people guided them sympathetically whenever they sought their help to show them the easiest route through the forests. They wondered why God had cursed the moon with lots of dark spots and made it grow smaller or bigger and compared the moon to these Godly figures who had been sent on exile and deprived of the comforts their tender bodies were accustomed to. They wondered why God had created comfortable beds when Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana slept on the ground on a bed of leaves; why had He created so much of food stuff when they

took roots and fruits only. They felt that everything that they were denied should not have been created by God. people even thought that they must be their own creations. Some of those people who missed to see them in their villages would run even to the next village till they would have the satisfaction of catching their glimpse. People, upon learning of the story of Shri Rama's exile would generally not talk well of either the King or Kaikeyi.

Shri Rama reaches Valmiki's Ashram

They reached the 'Ashram' of Rishi Valmiki. This 'Ashram' was very well located and had pretty surroundings. There were trees, flowers, ponds, streams and mountains etc. Shri Rama bowed before Sage Valmiki and received his blessings. He was thrilled to see Shri Rama accompanied by Sita and Laxmana. His eyes brightened on seeing them and offered them delicious fruits etc. with love. While praising the Rishi, Shri Rama told Sita and Laxmana that he was a 'Trikaldarshi' (one who can perceive everything relating to the past, present and future). Shri Rama related to the Rishi how Kaikeyi had exiled Him into the forests. He considered it all the fruit of His own (meritorious) actions and gratified mother Kaikeyi for enabling Him to have a glimpse of the Rishi while wandering through the forests. He asked the Rishi if he knew of a suitable place where they should construct a dwelling of grass and leaves and settle down for some time. Valmiki, the King of Sages, recognizing Shri Rama as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu told Him that He is the Preserver of the wisdom of Vedas, Sita is His divine

energy (Maya) creating, preserving and dissolving the Universre and Laxmana is none else than the thousand headed Sheshanag, the Supporter of the entire Earth and Lord of entire creation animate and inanimate. He added that He had taken a human form to annihilate demons for the benefit of 'devtas' and the devotees and only those persons can recognize Shri Rama whom He wishes to know Him. Valmiki said to Him, "Why do You ask this question to me ? There is no place where You do not stay." On hearing this, Shri Rama smiled to Himself, which the Sage perceived and He changed the topic. Valmiki advised them to stay in the heart of those who sing songs of their praise and mutter the Rama 'mantra' ("Shri Ramaye namaha!") and who are without lust, anger, fraud and hypocrisy. The Rishi further advised them to stay at chitrakoot, where there were hills, forests, streams, elephants, lions, deer and birds etc. The holy river Mandakini (brought by the penance of Anusuya, wife of Sage Atri), a tributary of the Ganges, flowed through that place. He informed Him that a lot of Sages including Sage Atri dwelled there. The two brothers and Sita took leave of the Rishi and set forth towards Chitrakoot.

Stay at Chitrakoot

They reached Chitrakoot and had a bath in the holy Mandakini. They selected a place and Gods descended along with Vishwakarma, the Chief of the Architects of God's domain, and took the guise of Kols and Bhils (local inhabitants). In no time they constructed two beautiful huts of leaves and grass. They departed after being blessed by Shri Rama and went to their abode. Lots of hermits living in Chitrakoot started visiting them

and were delighted to see and bless them. Shri Rama, Laxmana and Sita practiced 'Yoga' (contemplation) 'japa' (muttering of prayers) and performed sacrifices. Sita and Laxmana in the company of Shri Rama felt so happy at Chitrakoot in its wondeful environs that they forgot all their Palace comforts and even their parents. They felt as if Indra were living at Amravati with His wife Shuchi and son Jayant. Shri Rama looked after Sita and Laxmana in the same way as eyelids protect the eyeballs and Laxmana served Shri Rama and Sita as if They were part of his own body. Their stay at Chitrakoot was pleasant and peaceful.

Nishadaraja sees Sumantra

When Nishadaraja Guha returned, he saw Sumantra and the chariot en route. He found him in deep distress on the ground crying, "Rama, Rama ! Sita Laxmana!" The horses of the chariot were neighing about with tears in their eyes and looking southward where Shri Rama had gone. Nishadaraja, though himself distressed, consoled Sumantra and helped him sit on the chariot. When he found that he could not drive the chariot, he sent his four kinsmen to help Sumantra reach Ayodhya. Sumantra was pale and looked miserable. He was sunk within himself finding it hard to face King Dashratha, the Queens and the people at Ayodhya. As the chariot reached the bank of Tamsa river, he sent back the four kinsmen of Nishadaraja.

Sumantra reaches Ayodhya

Suffering from the guilt of not being able to persuade Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana to return, Sumantra passed the day lurking under a tree and entered Ayodhya only in the dark. He went straight to the Palaces and left the chariot at the Gate. People crowded at the Gate and were utterly disappointed to learn that Shri Rama had not returned. To Sumantra, the Palace looked like an abode of spirits with the spectre of gloom looming large everywhere. When the Queens enquired, he remained silent. He only enquired about the King. Seeing his condition the maid servants took him to Kaushalya's apartment where he found the King lying on the ground, pale and lusterless, without any seat, couch and ornaments. He was repeatedly crying, "Rama, Rama! Sita! Laxmana!"

Sumantra paid his obeisance to the King. The King, expecting that Shri Rama may have returned, rose up. Sumantra told him sequentially all about the journey, the first halt at Tamsa, the second on the banks of the Ganges where they had a bath, the hospitality of Nishadaraja, their halt at Shrangaverapura, how Kevat took them across the Ganges in his boat and their decision to stay on in the forests for the full period of fourteen years. He further told him that they had sent their obeisance to the King and Queens with a request to remain happy. Sumantra also conveyed their obeisance to Sage Vasishtha and their message for him that they would be obliged if he ensured that the King remained cheerful and did not grieve on account of their separation. Sumantra also conveyed Shri Rama's advice to Bharata, upon his return, that after becoming the Regent,

he should cherish the people of Ayodhya in thought, word and deed and serve all mothers alike. With a heavy heart Sumantra said that after Shri Rama had spoken, Sita also wanted to say something but overwhelmed with emotions and with a choked voice She uttered something that he was unable to hear. Meanwhile Shri Rama prompted to the Kevat to propel the boat and he remained at the bank of the Ganges watching the boat slowly drift across.

On listening to Sumantra, King Dashratha fell down on the floor again and started crying for Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana. While crying distressfully, he was reminded of a blind hermit's curse.

Dashratha's reflections of Shravan Kumar and his father's curse

King Dashratha narrated the story of the curse of the blind hermit who was the father of Shravan Kumar. This story has been told in Valmiki Ramayana. Dashratha, when young went to the forest for a hunt. When the sun was about to set, he heard a sound similar to trumpeting of an elephant. Being an expert in aiming at invisible sounding objects he released an arrow from his bow. It hit Shravan Kumar, a young boy who was collecting water in a pitcher from river Saryu for his blind and aged parents. When Dashratha went to take a look at the prey, to his surprise he found a young boy seriously hit by his arrow and a pitcher of water lying by his side. Dashratha realized that he had mistaken the sound of water, gurgling into the pitcher, to the trumpeting of an elephant. He was full of remorse on what he had accidentally done.

The dying boy requested Dashratha to carry the pitcher filled with water to his old thirsty parents who were sitting inside an improvised shoulder-carrier a little away from the river bank and also tell them what had happened. Dashratha did accordingly. When the blind old father and mother heard of their son's death they refused to take water and cursed Dashratha that he would die in grief for his son for having killed their only son who was also their sole attendant. Having cursed him, Shravana's parents gave up their ghost. After narrating the story, the King again got lost in Shri Rama and started crying, "Rama, Rama !"

King Dashratha passes away

Crying thus in agony, Dashratha cast off his body and ascended to the abode of Gods. There was gloom in the Palace. Everyone started weeping and blaming Kaikeyi for being the root cause of the King's death. Guru Vasishtha narrated a number of legends befitting the occasion to mitigate their distress. They made special arrangements for preserving the dead body till Bharata and Shatrughna would arrive for the cremation. They placed the dead body of the King in a Vat containing some oils etc. Messengers were sent hurriedly to call Bharata and Shatrughna back to Ayodhya.

Bharata and Shatrughna return to Ayodhya

When Bharata and Shatrughna reached Ayodhya they sensed that something wrong had taken place as they found the markets etc. deserted. Kaikeyi came to know about Bharata's arrival and rushed to the Palace Gate to receive him. She told him that she had accomplished everything for him with the help of her maid Manthra, though her plans were marred by the sad demise of the King. This grieved Bharata immensely and he started crying and blaming himself that he was not present when the King breathed his last. Bharata enquired about the cause of the King's demise. Kaikeyi narrated the whole story. The moment he heard of Shri Rama's exile, he was shocked beyond measure and almost forgot about his father. He held his ownself guilty for all that had happened. Kaikeyi tried to console him but he rebuked her for being so mean and cruel. He was so annoyed that he wished his mother had split into pieces when she contrived the evil thoughts. Even Shatrughna burned with rage and kicked Manthra on her hunch and she fell down with her teeth broken and hunch straightened. The moment he tried to drag her by the hair, Bharata rescued her out of mercy. The two brothers went to Kaushalya. Bharata was overwhelmed with grief especially because his own mother was responsible for the events that led to the departure of Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana to the forests followed by the demise of his father. He wept bitterly blaming his mother and feeling guilty himself. Kaushalya consoled him and told him not to blame anyone as it is the decree of Providence alone that guides the course of all events. She further comforted Bharata by saying that she knew for certain that he was not at all responsible for the king's death or Shri Rama's exile.

King Dashratha's cremation

While Bharata and Shatrughna were being consoled by Kaushalya, Sages Vamdev and Vasishtha came and advised Bharata to perform the primary duty of arranging for the cremation of the King. Accordingly, amidst chanting of Vedic 'mantras', the body of the King was given a wash, taken to the banks of Saryu, placed on a pile of sandalwood and consigned to flames as per the family rites. Bharata observed 'Dashagatra' (ceremony that consists of offering the departed soul a ball of boiled rice 'pind' on each day of the ten days following the cremation of the deceased). Hindus believe that the bereaved remain impure for this number of days according to Smritis, Puranas and Vedas.

Bharata asked to be the King

On an auspicious day following the completion of the funeral rites of Dashratha, Sage Vasishtha called Bharata and Shatrughna to the court where all the Queens, ministers and the elite and honourable citizens of Ayodhya had assembled. He first narrated the sequence of sad events viz. preparing for Shri Rama's coronation, Kaikeyi asking for the boons, exile of Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana deciding to join Him, their departure to the forests in hermit's attire culminating in the sad demise of King Dashratha. The Sage finally asked Bharata to take the reigns of governance in his hands as promised by the King to Kaikeyi. He told him that King

Dashratha was too great to be grieved for. He siad that one may pity a Brahmin for his ignorance of Vedas, a King for his lock of knowledge of politics, a Vaishya who locks hospitality inspite of the riches he possesses, a Shudra who is disrespectful towards a Brahmin, a woman who deceives her husband, a householder who forsakes his duty, an anchorite who gives up penance and enjoys luxuries, anyone who harms others and even one who is not sincere to the Lord, but one need not grieve and mourn for Dashratha whose glory knew no bounds and who was blessed with pious sons like Shri Rama, Bharata, Laxmana and Shatrughna. He said that if he accepted the throne and fulfilled his father's last wish everyone including the mothers would be extremely happy. All the ministers supported Sage Vasishtha's proposal that Bharata should ascend the throne. Even Kaushalya advised him to obey the Sage's advice.

Bharata's desire to bring back Shri Rama

Bharata heard the plea of the Sage, mother Kaushalya and others but said that all that had been said did not appeal his heart. He expressed that his conscience did not allow him to wear the crown when Shri Rama and Sita were facing all the hardships while living in exile. He said that he was born of a perverted woman inimical to Shri Rama and was, thus, a sinner. He feared he would not only be condemned by the people but the Earth would sink if he took over the reigns of kingdom in his hands. He frankly admitted that it pained him whenever it occurred to him that even Shri Rama would be suspecting his hand in the evil act. He said he would go to the forests and request Shri Rama to return. He felt sure that

Shri Rama would never turn down his request. He sought the blessings of the Sages and all others for carrying out this task. The plea put forth by Bharata was so sincere, naive and truthful as he himself was, that everyone got impressed with his words and considered him to be their last hope to reunite them with Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana. They thought it worthwhile to give another try to bring them back and a decision was taken to leave for the forests and request them to return to Ayodhya. So preparations were made so that the Sages, the mothers, the ministers including Bharata and Shatrughna and many people including volunteers, servants, etc. could leave for the forests to meet Shri Rama. Bharata, therefore, entrusted Ayodhya to the faithful servants to safeguard, during their absence, the treasuries and the kingdom which according to him rightfully belonged to Shri Rama.

Bharata leaves for forests to meet Shri Rama

The caravan left Ayodhya in chariots, carts, horsebacks etc. At the head were Sage Vasishtha and his consort, Arundhati, seated on the chariot with all the requisite material for the coronation of Shri Rama. Then followed the mothers in various palanquins, the ministers and the people. Bharata and Shatrughna went on foot. Seeing them walking, Kaushalya asked them to board respective chariots as otherwise everyone accompanying them would dismount and start walking adding to their misery and causing further delay. This led them to mount their respective chariots.

When Nishadaraja's kinsmen saw a huge caravan coming towards Shrangaverapura, they presumed that Bharata had come with an army to invade them. They passed alert orders everywhere. They manned all the ghats of the river and sealed them so that nobody could cross over. Some of them mounted on trees to keep a watch on their movement, remain there in hiding and ambush them with their arrows if need be. As the caravan approached nearer, someone sneezed from left side. An old man suspected it to be a good omen. He advised Nishadraja to send someone to enquire why they were coming. He warned the thaat any rash step taken without prior thought may bring disaster. Convinced by his elderly advice, Nishadaraja Himself proceeded to meet Bharata after instructing his people to shoot arrows only when he would signal them. When he approached them he at first saw Sage Vasishtha and therefore, fell on his feet, after disclosing his own name. As Bharata heard that Shri Rama's friend had paid obeisance to the Sage, he came running to him and embraced him. Bharata told him that those who take Shri Rama's name, even when idle are rid of their sins and he being Shri Rama's friend had, therefore, become the sanctifier of men by His touch and glimpse. It is interesting to know how Valmiki would mutter the words 'Mara - mara" which turned into "Rama" and he became equal to Brahama. Even Swapches (those who eat dog's flesh), the wild mountain tribes of Kols and Kiratas, the Bhil woman Shabri got supremely sanctified and became renowned. Bharata later introduced him to Shartughna and the Queens. Nishadaraja made all arrangements for their food and stay. They prayed to the Mother Ganges. Bharata offered a special prayer to the Mother Ganges wishing that his love and respect for

Shri Rama and Sita may remain everlasting. Bharata and Nishadaraja spent the night near the same place where Shri Rama and Sita had slept in the nighdt and prostrated before that place. They talked the whole night about Shri Rama and Sita's greatness and virtues. Bharata expressed his guilt for the hardship and suffering that Shri Rama was undergoing but Nishadaraja consoled him.

The next morning after adoring the feet of the Queens and the preceptor and offering the usual prayers etc. Bharata resumed the onward journey with Nishadaraja taking the lead and others following him. They crossed the river in boats arranged by the latter and walked along the track with which he was familiar. Bharata walked barefooted to subject himself to the same pain which Shri Rama had been put to for no fault of His. As they reached Prayagaraja, they halted and offered prayers at Triveni, the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna and the Saraswati. Bharata sought the boon of devotion to Shri Rama's feet, birth after birth, and not the riches nor comforts nor enjoyments nor eternal peace. Thereafter Bharata went to meet the great Sage Bhardwaja.

The Sage Bhardwaja, perceiving Bharata's plight told him that one has no control over the doings of fate. He told him not to get annoyed with his mother Kaikeyi, as her mind was deluded by Mother Saraswati, the Goddess of speech. He advised him to rule Ayodhya and fulfill his father's last wish as propounded by the Vedas and Dharma Shastras. He said, "Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana talked about you for the whole night they stayed here. They hold you in extreme love. I live in the forest

and have no concern with the world. I have earned the fruit of my penance (Sadhana) by meeting Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana and whatever was left unrealized has now been fulfilled by meeting you." Bharata was overwhelmed by the Sage's words but told him that his anguish crossed all limits of forbearance when he imagined how much pain his two brothers and Sita must be going through by walking barefooted in hermit's attire in dangeous forests, sleeping in the open and eating roots and fruits only. The Sage assured him that all his anguish would be over when he meets Shri Rama.

The next morning, after offering prayers at Prayaga and receiving guidance from the Sage, they set out for their onward journey. Bharata and Nishadaraja walked hand in hand and the others by their respective modes of carriage in which they had travelled all the way from Ayodhya.

Lord Indra along with other 'Devtas' were watching Bharata from the Heaven and got worried for the intense love he had for Shri Rama. They got nervous lest he should prevail on Shri Rama to return to Ayodhya, knowing that the latter loved Bharata from the bosom of His heart. Lord Indra expressed His anxiety to His preceptor Brihaspati and asked him to create some deceptive means that would not allow Bharata to meet Shri Rama. Brihaspati, the preceptor of Gods, thought unwise of Indra to resort to deceptive means against the devotee of Shri Rama who Himself is the Lord of Maya. He told Indra that those who play Maya (illusive power to create deceptive means) against Shri Rama's devotees call for serious trouble. He cautioned Him that Shri Rama may not get angry for any offence against Himself but He would

never tolerate anybody committing an offence against His single devotee. He said that Shri Rama considers such persons as His own enemies. He advised Devraj Indra not to interfere with Bharata and leave everything on Shri Ram.

While the caravan proceeded onwards, people from villages thronged to see them as they had done when Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana treaded through these villages. On seeing Bharata some people would remark that it must have been a travesty of fate that he was born of Kaikeyi, while others would say that it was their own good luck that brought them that way enabling them to see Shri Rama, Sita, Laxmana, Bharata and Shatrughna. En route, Bharata visited all the holy places where Shri Rama had gone and also the places where He had night halts.

<u>Bharata reaches close to Chitrakoot</u>

As they went on and approached Chitrakoot it so happened that the right eyelid and arm of men and the left in case of women in Bharata's entourage started twitching. They thought it to be a good omen. At the same time, on waking up from sleep Sita told Shri Rama that She had seen Bharata, the Queens and people of Ayodhya coming to them in Her dream. She said that She had seen their faces anxiety-borne and full of pain and the Queens were also not in their usual apparel. This brought tears in Shri Rama's eyes and He told Laxmana that it was a sign of some bad news. He sat facing north and after sometime saw a huge cloud of dust coming up and lots of birds flying towards them. While He was

pensively watching this, the local inhabitants (Kols and Bhils) came running to inform that Bharata was coming with lots of people following him. He wondered why he should be coming towards them and was upset. Laxmana, sensing Shri Rama's anxiety, told Him that He loves and trusts everyone considering them as part of His own self. He said that he was certain that Bharata, after occupying the throne of Ayodhya, was not content with their exile only and in a bid to do away with them had come with his army comprising of soldiers, elephants and horses. Besides himself with rage, he picked up his bow and arrows and waited for Shri Rama's permission to fight them all single-handedly. He promised that he would kill anyone who came forth to do Him any harm.

While Laxmana was uttering these harsh words, a divine voice came to him, warning him that strong as he was he should not take any action without prior thought. The Vedas and the wise have said the action taken impulsively and without proper thought leads one to repentance. Hearing the divine voice, Laxmana calmed down. Shri Rama told Laxmana that what he said was true only for those Kings who get intoxicated with power and lose contact with saints but He was sure that Bharata would not do this in the wildest of his dreams.

Bharata meets Shri Rama

Bharata noticed from a distance the hut where Shri Rama stayed and halted on the banks of Mandakini. They all had a bath and thereafter Bharata with due permission of Sage Vasishtha and the Queens proceeded with Nishadaraja and Shatrughna to meet Shri Rama. In the heart of his hearts, he felt diffident fearing Shri Rama might run away on seeing him approaching towards them, taking him to be an accomplice of Kaikeyi and up on yet another mischief. Inspite of these bad thoughts he felt sure that Shri Rama would never give him up. Seeing Bharata's condition, Nishadaraja saw some good omens and remarked to Bharata that all his anxiety would vanish and give place to delight followed ultimately with sorrow. As they were very near the hut, they were enthralled to see the pleasing environs, birds, trees, plants etc. and noticed Shri Rama, Laxmana and Sita wearing hermit's robes, bows and arrows slung round Shri Rama and Laxmana's shoulders and a couple of hermits sitting near them. Bharata prostrated before Shri Rama, praying within himself for His protection. Laxmana recognized his voice though he did not see him as his gaze was fixed on Shri Rama to whom he was listening with rapt attention as per his usual habit. Laxmana told Shri Rama that Bharata was paying Him obeisance. Shri Rama at once stood up, proceeded towards Bharata, lifted him up and clasped him to His bosom. Both displayed a lot of love for each other. Gods in Heaven, watching this scene got worried lest their plans should fail. Shatrughna also bowed to Shri Rama followed by Laxmana. Both of them embraced him warmly. Nishadaraja also bowed to Shri Rama and Laxmana. Then all the three bowed at the feet

of Sita. She showered Her blessings on them. They were so engrossed in wishing each other that it was only Nishadaraja who told Shri Rama that the Queens, Sage Vasishtha, ministers and many residents of Ayodhya had also come to see them. Hearing this, they left Shatrughna with Sita and ran to meet them. Shri Rama bowed to Sage Vasishtha and then the mothers, who looked sad and broken. First of all He met Kaikeyi and consoled her that whatever had han happened was due to no fault of her as that was what God wished to be. Thereafter, Shri Rama and Laxmana met Arundhati, the preceptor's wife, other Brahmin ladies and then Sumitra and Kaushalya. They greeted the ministers and others and requested them to come to their hut. When they entered the hut, Sita bowed at the feet of Sage Vasishtha, his consort Arundhati and the mothers. They all blessed Her. She also exchanged greetings with others who accompanied Bharata.

Shri Rama informed of King Dashratha's demise

Everyone sat around Guru Vasishtha who gave a discourse on spiritual matters, nature of the illusory world and disclosed that King Dashratha had left for heavenly abode. This pained Shri Rama very much and He along with Laxmana, Sita and the mothers lamented a lot as if he had passed away that very time. The Sage comforted them. Shri Rama took a bath in Mandakini, offered special rites for His father as advised by the Guru and observed a a fast for that day. Along with Him, everyone observed a fast on that day. They spent two days there and were served with roots and fruits only. Shri Rama finally told them that they were all inconvenienced there as He

could offer them nothing to eat besides roots and fruits. He advised them to return to Ayodhya which must have become desolate without them. He told Sage Vasishtha not to misunderstand Him and to pardon Him if He had hurt their feelings. The Sage told Him that they were enjoying their stay with them and would like to continue for some more time. They went round to see the place, the hermitage, the hills, trees, streams, springs, lakes, lotuses, birds, animals etc. The local inhabitants consisting of Kols, Bhils, Kiratas etc. served them honey, roots, fruits, bulbs and sprouts in cups made of leaves. Sita assumed three forms to serve the mothers equally well and make them comfortable. Only Shri Rama knew of this mystery of Sita's illusive power. She thus, got their blessings in abundance.

Kaikeyi was all along sad and remorseful. Her agony increased at the sight of Shri Rama, Laxmana and Sita. She prayed that God of Death may either take her life away or the mother Earth may swallow her by splitting open under her feet.

Everyone kept guessing whether Shri Rama would agree to return to Ayodhya. Bharata had sleepless nights and could not take his food. He would always be engrossed in the thought of how to accomplish the coronation of Shri Rama. Though convinced in his mind that if preceptor Vasishtha or mother Kaushalya compelled Shri Rama to return to Ayodhya, He would never refuse, yet he was not sure.

Bharata attempts to persuade Shri Rama to return

One day, after everyone had offered his morning prayers, Sage Vasishtha summoned everybody in an assembly and said, "Shri Rama, the Sun of Solar race is a champion of righteousness and true to His word. He maintains morality as laid in the Vedas. He is obedient to His parents and Sage, a friend of Gods, God fearing and an enemy of the wicked. He is Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, the Moon God, the Sun God, all in one and dependent on none except Himself. If His coronation is performed, it would certainly be good for all." He told the audience to ponder and suggest how to convince and prevail over Him to return to Ayodhya, so that they all follow a common strategy. When no one spoke, Bharata stood up with folded hands and pleaded to Guru Vasishtha to show them the right path as his benediction removes sorrow and confers blessings and there was no one else who could assuage their feelings. The Sage was moved by his words and said, "All this is due to Shri Rama's grace." He expressed his opinion that Bharata and Shatrughna may replace Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana, who in that case can return to Ayodhya. This brought jubilation amongst Bharata and Shatrughna but it made no difference for the mothers who could not live without any of their children. Bharata wanted the Guru to pronounce what he had said and redeem the situation. Therefore, they all went to Shri Rama and the Sage told Him that He being omniscient, wise, prudent and virtuous was capable of finding a way by which the people of Ayodhya, the mothers and Bharata would be satisfied. Shri Rama replied that He would abide by whatever he wished and ordered Him to do. The Sage told Shri Rama, "Bharata's

devotion has robbed me of my wits and therefore, whatever you say for the good of all shall be carried out." The Sage then asked Bharata to reveal what he had in his heart. Emboldened by good words spoken about him both by the Sage as well as Shri Rama, Bharata said, "Shri Rama has always been good and Kind to me. I have never left His company since my childhood and have never gathered courage to speak in His presence. Unfortunately, my own fate does not bear Shri Rama's fondness for me as a result of which my own mother created a cleft between us. I feel sorry to say so about my mother. Everyone is in pain to see Shri rama separated from us and treading through the forests barefooted. I hold myself to be totally responsible for it. I wish that Shri Rama should return to Ayodhya and relieve everyone's pain."

Moved by Bharata's words, Shri Rama rose up and said, "Bharata is feeling bad for nothing as one's destiny is decided by God alone. Only such people as are ignorant and never live in company of a Guru or holy assemblage blame mother Kaikeyi. Bharata's name itself is sufficient to obliterate one's sins and errors. Bharata should give no room to bad thoughts. I am merely trying to keep my father's vow and executing his last wish of staying in the forests for fourteen years. How can I myself go back on it especially when the King is no more?"

Seeing this dialogue transpire at Chitrakoot, the Gods in Heaven feared lest their hopes should get shattered. They approached Shri Rama through telepathy for their own protection. They deliberated among themselves and decided to invoke Bharata

Their preceptor Brihaspati approved of this idea. Bharata's mind was full of solutions and with all humility, he told Shri Rama that he had brought all the requisite material for performing His coronation and it would be in the fitness of things if He along with Laxmana and Sita returned to Ayodhya. He suggested that they would be replaced by himself and Shatrughna and alternatively he would replace Laxmana who could return to Ayodhya. He put forth yet another suggestion that Shri Rama and Sita should return and instead the three brothers himself, Laxmana and Shatrughna would stay in the forest.

King Janaka arrives at Chitrakoot

While the discussion was going on messengers of King Janaka (Sita's father) informed Sage Vasishtha of the arrival of his Highness and his party. They said that King Janaka was deeply shocked when he learnt about the sad demise of King Dashratha and entire Janakpuri mourned his death. The news of Shri Rama's departure for fourteen years exile caused further grief to everyone. Therefore, King Janaka thought it best to get first hand information from Ayodhya and sent his spies there. They informed him that Shri Rama had already left for exile along with Sita and Laxmana and Bharata having spurned the throne, had also gone to the forests to persuade all of them to return to Ayodhya. Therefore, he decided to make a move and without taking any rest en route, he and his entourage had reached and halted a little away. Sage Vasishtha was pleased and so was everyone present there. Escorts were sent with the messengers to request them to come and join them. Every citizen of Ayodhya was delighted yet Shri Rama was

feeling uncomfortable within Himself. Kaikeyi got sunken with further remorse and Indra, the King of Celestial, became more anxious. After deliberating they dispersed for the night and reassembled the next mornig after performing their ablutions and prayers to Lord Ganesha, Shiva, Parvati and Vishnu. They prayed for Shri Rama's return to Ayodhya. While the citizens of Ayodhya were talking and blessing their eyes with the sight of Shri Rama, King Janaka came. As Shri Rama saw him come, He stood up to receive him. King Janaka paid obeisance to the Sage and elders. As they settled down, they were all plunged into grief when King Janaka expressed shock over the sad demise of King Dashratha. Seeing King Janaka's grief, Sage Vasishtha consoled him. The entire day passed in lamentation. The Sage tried to pacify them by relating stories froms Vedas and other scriptures. They were served with fruits and roots to eat and through the grace of Shri Rama, the forest yielded all these in abundance.

Sunaina meets Kaushalya

Sunaina came to see Kaushalya on an auspicious hour after enquiring if she was free. Kaushalya told her that sorrow and joy, loss and gain are all determined by our past actions. She said that only God knows everything and dispenses the fruits of one's good or bad actions. She further told her that it would be good if Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana stayed in the forest but her main worry was on account of Bharata who was not only modest and naive but rich in character, devotion, brotherly affection, faith and goodness. She suggested to Sunaina to tell King Janaka to persuade Laxmana to return and

Bharata to join Shri Rama in the forest. They went on talking till it was past midnight. While being seen off by Kaushalya, Sunaina requested her if she could send Sita with her. Sita joined Her mother. When King Janaka saw Her he clasped Her with his bosom, consoled Her and gave Her a lot of affection. She stayed with them for sometime and then sought their permission to return to her mothers thinking that it was more important for Her to serve them. King Janaka and Sunaina appreciated Sita's wisdom and Her decision to accompany Shri Rama to the forest.

<u>Last attempt to persuade Shri Rama to return</u>

After a number of days had passed, Shri Rama called on Sage Vasishtha in the morning and told Him that the sight of Bharata, the mothers, King Janaka and other people enduring all difficulties in the forests for the last so many days made Him feel very uneasy. Therefore, He wanted the Sage to do what he considered the best without any further delay. The Sage told Him that without Shri Rama all amenities of life were like hell to all of them and that He was the life of life, the soul of soul and joy of joy. He added that they perish who do not love the feet of Shri Rama. Shri Rama appreciated what they went though in their minds. Talking, thus, Vasishtha asked Him to return to His hut and he himself went to meet King Janaka and informed him about his meeting with Shri Rama. He wanted the King to do something that would please everyone.

King Janaka went to Bharata, who greeted him with due respect and warmth, and enquired from him what

he actually wanted so that the same could be communicated. Bharata considered himself to be a mere child before all the Sages, ministers and others present including the King himself. He found himself wrongly placed to say anything to the King. But fearing lest he should be misunderstood of being black hearted he told King Janaka that Shri Rama was obedient to the sacred vow that their father had taken and consistent in His duty and therefore, whatever was approved to be good for all might be done. He said to him, "Vedas and Puranas depict that the duty of a servant to a master is hard and incompatible with selfishness."

King Janaka, Bharata and Sage Vasishtha called the full assembly and approached Shri Rama. They all sat together. Seeing their emotions and Bharata's devotion to Shri Rama, Lord Indra grew nervous and along with other Gods invoked Goddess Saraswati. They requested Her to delude Bharata's mind to preserve heavenly race. She did not oblige Indra again and accused Him that selfishness had robbed Him of His senses. She told Him even Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva cannot face Bharata's reason. She retired to Her abode, leaving Indra and the Gods at the mercy of Bharata.

Sage Vasishtha revealed to Shri Rama everything that Bharata had told King Janaka and wanted Him to resolve the problem and promised Him that whatever He said would be taken as an order and followed. Shri Rama replied that in the presence of the Sage and the King, He was no one to say anything and whatever they would say, He would obey. Sage Vasishtha felt embarrassed as Shri Rama again left in for him to make the final decision

and could not speak a word. Bharata gathered courage, bowing his head and joining his palms he said, "Shri Rama is my father, mother, preceptor, friend, master, an object of adoration and my great benefactor. Shri Rama is amiable, omniscient, omnipotent, befriender of those taking refuge in Him and protector of the suppliant. He has been good and kind to me. I have come to the forest in defiance of His commands and have not only been blessed by Him but continue to receive His affection." Then he begged of Shri Rama that his only desire was to serve Him with guileless affection and saying so Bharata clasped His feet. Shri Rama lifted Bharata and seated him by His side.

Indra bent upon using deluding powers of Gods, infatuated everyone in the assembly barring Bharata, King Janaka, Sages, saints and ministers with the result that they came under the influence of wavering thoughts so much so that sometimes they wished to stay with Shri Rama in the forests and the next moment they would wish to go home to their children. No one could reveal their thoughts to the companions and kept it to themselves. Shri Rama conceived the state of mind of the assembled persons and also of King Janaka, Sage Vasishtha, ministers and others who were moved by Bharata's devotion to Shri Rama.

Finding an opportune moment, Shri Rama told the assembly, "Bharata is an upholder of righteousness, well versed in Vedas and family traditions, pure in thought, word and deed and knows what the duties of everyone should be. It is only due to our preceptor that our interests, honour, name, virtue have been conserved after the demise of King dashratha. I advise Bharata to obey the

preceptor's command and make people of Ayodhya happy. I know how people have taken my leaving for the forests and how greatly it shall affect Bharata during the period of my exile." Bharata was happy to listen to Shri Rama and waited for His command now. He told Him that he had brought all the material and waters of holy places for His coronation and was awaiting His orders in this connection. Shri Rama told Bharats to go round in Chitrakoot, see various hermitages including that of Sage Atri and abide by what he says.

Bharata meets Sage Atri

When Bharata met Sage Atri, he was advised to pour all the waters he had brought from holy places for coronation in a well adjoining a hill nearby. He hinted that his attempts to persuade Shri Rama to return will not bear fruit. Bharata and Shatrughna brought all the vessels containing the waters from holy places and poured it in the weil. Atri told them that the well would henceforth be called Bharata Kupa (a sacred well in the name of Bharata). People who bathe with the water of this holy well will become pure in thought, word and deed. Bharata roamed about in the forest barefooted along with Shatrughna and others and spent five days in visiting all the places.

Bharata returns to Ayodhya

When everybody assembled again Bharata sought Shri Rama's permission for departure to Ayodhya and told Shri Rama to give him something by which He would be able to behold His feet for the fourteen years. Shri Rama replied that Guru Vasishtha, Sage Vishwamitra and King Janaka would always favour what is the best for Bharata in Ayodhya and His ownself in the forests. It was good for them to obey their father's command to maintain his reputation. He advised Bharata that those who follow the advice of their preceptor, father, mother and master never stumble in their lives. Shri Rama bade Bharata to go and rule Ayodhya in accordance with 'Shastras' till the period of His exile. At the request of Bharata, Shri Rama gave him His wooden sandals, which Bharata reverently placed on His head, taking these as a prop to help him in his love and devotion to Shri Rama, guard Raghu's race and perform noble deeds as the King. Bharata was now as happy as he would have been had Shri Rama returned to Ayodhya.

Bidding him farewell, Shri Rama clasped Bharata hard and tears rolled down Bharata's eyes. Then He clasped Shatrughna. Bharata hugged Laxmana and Shatrughna bowed to him. The two brothers then bowed to Sita and received Her blessings. Shri Rama and Laxmana bowed to King Janaka and got his blessings. They then reverently bowed to the Sages who blessed them. Shri Rama and Laxmana bowed to Queen Sunaina. They also bowed to the ministers, Nishadaraja and others who had come. Shri Rama adored the feet of Kaikeyi, embraced her and rid her of all her embarrassment. Sita also bowed to King Janaka and Her mother after bowing to all the Sages, ministers and others.

Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana also embraced their mothers Kaushalya and Sumitra and received their blessings.

Bharata having left with his entourage for Ayodhya, Shri Rama, Laxmana and Sita returned to their hut with a mixed feeling of joy and sorrow. They watched them go till they went out of sight. The caravan halted for a night at Shrangaverapura after crossing the Ganges, where Nishadaraja made all arrangements for them. They ferried across Gomti and reached Ayodhya on the fourth day. King Janaka stayed with them for four days to look after state administration and treasury and after entrusting the reins of kingdom to Bharata and the ministers, he left for Tirhut, the Capital of Janakpuri.

<u>Bharata assumes responsibilities of rein over Ayodhya</u>

Bharata allotted various responsibilities to the ministers and placed Shatrughna in the service of the mothers. He told his citizens that whatever work high or low, good or indifferent was required to be done, they should not hesitate to tell him. He sought the blessings of his preceptor and selecting an auspicious day, placed the wooden sandals of Shri Rama on the throne of Ayodhya. With the permission of Sage Vasishtha and mother Kaushalya he constructed a hut of leaves at Nandigrama, outside the city, and made it his abode. He wore hermit's robes, maintained tuft of matted locks on his head and laid 'Kusha' grass on the floor on which he sat during day and slept at night. He even observed austerity in eating. He thinned down considerably by observing such practices, but the brightness of his face

did not subside. His firm faith Shri Rama would return after the appointed period, kept him going with full enthusiasm. Even the people of Ayodhya started practicing austerity and praying for quick expiry of the period of exile. Bharata worshipped the Sandals daily and constantly referred to them for guidance and for judicious disposal of State affairs.

End of Ayodhya Kanda

The story of Bharata is charming and delightful. It is a source of joy and blessing and drives away all sins and difficulties of 'Kaliyuga'. It disperses delusions and sufferings. Whoever hears or reads this story shall certainly acquire devotion to Shri Rama and Sita and distaste for the transient pleasures of life.

*** End of Descent II ***

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SHRI RAMACHARITAMANASA (THE MANASAROVAR OF MIND CLEANSING DEEDS AND EXPLOITS OF SHRI RAMA)

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DESCENT - 3
(ARANYA KANDA)

"Sarsij lochan bahu bisala, jata mukut sir ur vanmala,
Syam gor sundara dhou bhai, Sabri pari charan laptai."

..... (Shri Ramacharitamanasa, Descent - III/4-34)

(With lotus-eyes, long arms, a tuft of matted hair adorning their head like a crown and a garland of wild flowers hanging upon their breast, the two brothers looked most charming - one of them dark complexioned and the other fair; Shabri fell prostrate and embraced their feet.)

Lord Shankara told Uma that so far He had narrated to Her about Shri Rama's birth, boyhood, marriage, the love and affection the people of Ayodhya had for Him and Bharata and how dearly Bharata loved his elder brother Shri Rama. He said that the exploits of Shri Rama in the forests were equally interesting and then proceeded on to narrate the same to Her.

Shri Rama punishes Jayant

While living in the forests, one day Shri Rama picked a number of flowers of various colours. With these flowers He made beautiful floral ornaments and lovingly adorned Sita's hair and ears with them. Indra, the Lord of Celestial had a son named Jayant. One day Jayant hit upon a foolish way of testing the might of Shri Rama. He took the form of a crow and flew to the forest where Shri Rama and Sita were sitting. The crow came near them and bit Sita's foot with its beak and flew away. When Shri Rama noticed that Her foot was bleeding He angrily hurled an arrow presided over by Brahma 'the Brahmastra' which followed the crow till it reached Lord Indra. The crow changed its form and Jayant stood before his father and sought His shelter against Shri Rama's arrow. His father refused to give him shelter. Jayant went to the abode of Brahma and Shiva and pleaded for protection but They expressed Their helplessness saying that he would have to pay for his misdeed. The Sage Narada saw Jayant in distress and advised him to go and apologize before Shri Rama. Jayant, therefore, went to Shri Rama and expressed his apology. Shri Rama, being all merciful, spared his life. Jayant, however, lost only one of his eyes as a lesson for future to dissuade him from hurting anyone.

Anusuya blesses Sita

Having stayed at Chitrakoot for many days and fearing that many had known Him and more would come to know Him Shri Rama decided to leave and proceed further to a place where people from Ayodhya would not be able to trace Him and again put pressure on Him to return. Before departure from Chitrakoot they called at Sage Atri. The Sage blessed them. Anusuya, the Sage's consort, presented heavenly robes and ornaments to Sita which always remained clean. She also gave the following instructions regarding duties of a wife to Sita:

* Mother, father and brother are all kind but give limited joy to a lady whereas a husband gives her unlimited joy.
* A woman refusing to serve her husband is wily.
* A wife should stand by her husband in times of adversity.
* A wife who disrespects her husband even though he is old, sick, blind, deaf or dull-witted suffers all her life.
* A wife should be devoted to her husband in body, speech and mind.
* A wife who deceives her husband and loves a paramour is thrown into the worst form of hell.
* A wife who sincerely takes her vow of fidelity to her husband easily attains the highest state.

* A woman, impure by her birth, attains bliss by serving her husband.

Her advice gave a lot of strength to Sita. After receiving their blessings they set forth to seek a new dwelling place for them. While they were on their way, clouds would appear in the sky and move along with them to give them shade in the scorching heat.

Viradha killed

A demon named Viradha confronted them en route and Shri Rama killed him straightaway.

A vow to save Sages from demons

A number of Sages met them along the route they followed. They saw a heap of bones at one place. Though knowing everything, Shri Rama enquired from the Sages why such a pile of human skeleton existed at that place. He was pained to learn that it was the handiwork of demons who once killed an assemblage of Sages while they were performing sacrifices. Shri Rama's eyes were filled with tears and He vowed to rid the Earth of all demons.

Sage Sarbhanga meets Shri Rama

They visited Sage Sarbhanga's ashram. At that time he was preparing to go into 'Brahama Samadhi'. The glimpse of Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana filled him with immense joy. He greeted them warmly and told them how anxiously he had all along been waiting to see them. He sought a boon that Shri Rama along with Sita and

Laxmana should ever reside in his heart. Having been blessed he went into Brahama Samadhi and departed for Shri Rama's abode.

Sutikshana meets Shri Rama

Sutikshana, a disciple of Sage Agastya was a great lover of Shri Rama. As he learnt that Shri Rama was going through the forest, he went to see Him. Shri Rama, who knew his love and devotion, revealed Himself in Sutikshana's heart when he came before Him. The Sage sat motionless on the road. Shri Rama then tried to lift him but could not and therefore, withdrew Himself from his heart and manifested His four-armed form in his heart. Sutikshana at once opened his eyes having lost the beautiful sight of Shri Rama in his mind. Shri Rama then clasped and blessed him. He took Shri Rama to his hermitage where he was told to ask for a boon. The Sage expressed his sincere desire that He ever remained in his heart along with Sita and Laxmana. Shri Rama granted him the boon and blessed him to be ever devoted to Him, free from all worldly desires and full of knowledge and spiritual wisdom.

Shri Rama meets Agastya

Sutikshana took them to the hermitage of his 'Guru', Sage Agastya. As Sutikshana entered, he prostrated before the Sage and informed him of the arrival of Shri Rama along with Sita and Laxmana. Agastya ran to receive them. They fell at the Sage's feet but he lifted and clasped them before seating them by his side. A number of Sages in the hermitage came to see them.

Shri Rama told Sage Agastya, "I know the purpose for which I have come to the forest. Please advise as to where shall I go to annihilate these demons, the enemies of the hermits ?" The Sage replied, "Nothing in this Universe is hidden from You and You Yourself know everything. I only wish that You along with Sita forever stayed in my heart." Thereafter he told Him how to reach a nice and holy spot named Panchavati in Dhandaka forest where He should reside. The Sage said, "This forest is under the curse of Sage Shukracharya. It would be nice to redeem the forest from his curse for the benefit of Sages."

Shri Rama reaches Panchavati

As advised by Sage Agastya Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana left for Dhandaka forests and reached Panchavati. They came near Godavari and made a hut of leaves over there. They met Jattayu, the King of Vultures and developed friendship with him.

Once sitting together, Laxmana asked Shri Rama, "Kindly tell me how can I ever adore the dust of Your feet to the exclusion of everything. What is meant by spiritual wisdom, dispassion, illusion and devotion? What is the difference between God and Individual?" Shri Rama said, "I and mine, you and yours, is illusion (Maya). This is what has engulfed everyone. Whatever one has in mind is also illusion. This may be of two types viz. knowledge and ignorance. The former is good and comes by the grace of God and the latter is the source of all miseries and leads one to ego that sinks a person in worldly desires. Spiritual wisdom is free from all bad qualities and traits

viz. pride, lust, greed etc. It sees the Supreme Spirit equally in all. A man of supreme dispassion is one who has spurned all supernatural powers as well as the three 'gunas' which the Universe is composed of Individual soul (Jiva) is one which does not know illusion (Maya) nor his ownself nor God. Dispassion results from the practice of virtue whereas spiritual wisdom comes through practice of Yoga. Devotion leads to eternal bliss and can be acquired through the favour of a saint. Devotion is of nine forms viz. hearing of Lord 's praise and stories (Shrawana), Chanting God's name and praises (Kiratana), fixing one's thought in God (Smarana), adoring God's feet (Padasevana), worshipping God's image (Archana), Making obeisance to God (Vandana), offering devout service to God (Dasya), cultivating friendship with God (Sakhya), offering oneself to God (Atmanivedana). I always repose Myself in the heart of My devotees". Laxmana was extremely happy to learn and listen to the advice on Devotion (Bhakti) from his brother.

Shrupanakha's nose is cut

Ravana, the demon King of Lanka, had a sister by the name of Shrupanakha who was a cruel, foul hearted demoness having nails as big as winnowing fans. She once went to Panchavati and saw Shri Rama and Laxmana. She was infatuated by their charm and assumed the form of a beautiful lady. She first approached Shri Rama and told Him that their was neither a man more beautiful than Him nor a woman more beautiful than herself. She suggested that they were a perfect match for each other and He should consider marrying her. Shri Rama looked at Sita and told

Shrupanakha to go to Laxmana as he was a bachelor. Both of them knew that she was a demoness in disguise. She went to Laxmana but he told her that he was only a servant of his elder brother, the King of Ayodhya and she would not be happy with a servant. She again went to Shri Rama but He sent her back to Laxmana who in turn sent her back to Shri Rama. She became furious and revealed her true form of a demoness. This frightened Sita and taking a cue from Shri Rama, Laxmana quickly cut off her nose and ears. Shrupanakha ran away bleeding profusely and crying in pain. In this way Shri Rama sent an indirect warning to Ravana.

Shri Rama kills Khara, Dushana and Trisira

Shrupanakha went to her brothers Khara, Dushana and Trisira and sobbing with her nose and ears bleeding, she told them what the two Princes had done to her at Panchavati. They were enraged and proceeded with a huge army to Panchavati. Shrupanakha led them to show them the way. As soon as they saw Shri Rama and Laxmana, they threatened them aloud that they would catch and kill them and take away Sita. Shri Rama told Laxmana to take Sita to some mountain cave and let Him single-handedly deal with the horde of demons. Shri Rama coiled His matted lock of hair, lifted His bow and arrows and became ready to face the demons. As demons approached nearer, they started becoming powerless to fight. Khara and Dushana were amazed at the sight of Shri Rama who seemed to them more beautiful than any Naga, demon or God. They sent messengers to Shri Rama to convey Him that He, being extra-ordinarily beautiful, would be spared by them provided He

Surrendered His wife to them. Shri Rama could not bear their threat and challenged them to fight. This further enraged the demon Prince. They started attacking Shri Rama with all types of weapons and missiles but these could not reach Shri Rama. As Shri Rama hurled arrows from His bow, the demon army went in a disarray. Together Khara, Dushana and Trisira, launched a combined frontal attack. Shri Rama hurled His 'Naracha astra' which tore the bodies of many warriors into pieces. Simultaneously ten arrows pierced through the chest of each brother and they fell down. However, due to their illusive powers they did not die and rose up again and started fighting. Shri Rama then played His Cosmic illusory power which cast a spell on the demons and they saw one another in the form of Shri Rama. They, thus, fought amongst themselves and perished. Shri Rama, thus, removed the fear of demons from the minds of Sages and other human beings whom they always used to torment. Sita and Laxmana joined Him a little later and He clasped Laxmana joyously.

Shrupanakha complains to Ravana

Shrupanakha, seeking vengeance, went to her brother Ravana to instigate him against Shri Rama. She showed him her badly cut nose and ears and told him the whole story and how Khara, Dushana and Trisira were massacred by Shri Rama. This enraged Ravana and he set out on his chariot to the sea-shore where Maricha lived.

Sita entrusted to the God of Fire.

Laxmana had once gone to collect fruits and roots in the woods. Shri Rama and Sita were alone in the hut. Shri Rama told Sita, "You are an epitome of virtuosity and absolutely faithful to Me. There is a lot of danger from dreadful demons in the forest and therefore, for Your safety I want to entrust You to the God of Fire till I completely decimate them." She readily consented. Imprinting the image of Shri Rama's feet in Her heart She created Her Shadow that would henceforth remain with Shri Rama. She was then entrusted to the God of Fire. The Shadow She left behind resembled Her in all respects viz. shape, size, disposition, etc. When Laxmana returned he could not notice Sita's transformation nor did he come to know of this episode.

Ravana abducts Sita

Ravana reached Maricha and told him the whole story. He wanted Maricha to go to Panchavati where Shri Rama, Sita and Laxmana resided and take the appearance of a deer and create such a situation that he could easily abduct Sita. Maricha knew that Shri Rama was no ordinary Prince but the Lord Himself. He requested Ravana not to use him for taking his revenge while reflecting upon his earlier traumatic experience when Shri Rama had with His single arrow thrown him 800 miles away during the sacrifice performed by Vishwamitra. Ravana got infuriated and threatened to kill him. Maricha thought it was no good to create animosity with the following type of persons :

* One who is skilled in the use of weapons.
* One who knows one's secret.
* One who is one's powerful master.
* One who is a dunce.
* One who is a wealthy person.
* One who is a physician.
* One who is panygyrist.
* One who is a poet.
* One who is an expert cook.

He, therefore, thought it better to die at the hands of Shri Rama Himself rather than the demon King Ravana. He finally gave his assent and they went near the hut of Shri Rama.

Maricha assumed the guise of a golden deer. Sita saw the charming deer and begged of Shri Rama to get Her its golden hide which looked so beautiful. Shri Rama saw through the plot hatched by Ravana to allure Sita with the golden deer impersonated by Maricha. However He obliged Sita for the benefit of Gods. He told Laxmana to take care of Sita and not to leave Her alone as there were a lot of demons roaming in the forests. He ran after the deer. The deer took to his heels out of scare, occasionally looking back at Shri Rama and then ran again. Shri Rama chased the deer over a long distance and at an opportune moment took the aim with His arrow. As the arrow pierced the deer, Maricha assumed his real form and with a voice resembling that of Shri Rama, cried out aloud the name of "Laxmana", and instantly fell down dead muttering the name of Shri Rama. As Sita and Laxmana heard the call, the former thought that Shri Rama was in distress and calling for help. She, therefore, requested Laxmana to go and find out what had happened. Laxmana took it easy and did not

agree to leave Her alone saying that he could not violate Shri Rama's orders to stand on guard for Her protection. However, Sita insisted with very sharp words that cut him to the quick and he left much against his wish leaving Sita to the care of Gods and deities presiding over the forest.

Finding an opportune time to kidnap Sita, Ravana, who was hiding nearby and watching them closely, came in the guise of a starved recluse asking for food. He told Her lots of alluring stories depicting political wisdom at times to show Her the best course to ameliorate Her condition and when She disagreed he tried to convince Her with love and threat. Sita admonished Ravana at which he felt insulted and depicted his ten-headed form. He took Her forcibly away inspite of Her resistance and warnings, seated Her in his chariot and flew off southwards.

Sita cries for help

Sita went on crying for help from the flying chariot. She kept on repeating that Laxmana was not at fault as She had Herself used sharp words at him and sent him in search of Shri Rama against His wishes. She wanted someone to listen to Her and inform Shri Rama lest He should misunderstand Laxmana.

Jattayu's wings chopped by Ravana

Jattayu, the King of vultures heard Sita's distress calls and went to help Her. He confronted Ravana and a fight took place between them. Jattayu warned Ravana that he and his family would perish at the hands of Shri Rama for committing such a sinful act but Ravana obsessed with his ego scorned at him and threatened to kill him if he ventured to come in his way. A fight ensued between them. Jattayu lifted Ravana by his hair, threw him on the ground and tore his body with his sharp beak. Ravana took control of himself again and cut off the wings of Jattayu with his sword. Jattayu fell down and was unable to fly again. He remained on the ground invoking the name of Shri Rama. Ravana took Sita with him in the chariot and continued his flight in the southerly direction.

Sita drops Her ornaments

Crying in distress Sita noticed many monkeys on a hill and dropped Her ornaments bundled in a piece of cloth torn from Her sari uttering Shri Rama's name. These were later picked up by monkeys and handed over to their Chief called Sugriva. Sugriva instructed them to preserve these as such.

Sita confined in Ashoka garden

Ravana took Sita to Lanka and left Her in Ashoka garden. She had placed in Her heart the beautiful image of Shri Rama while He was running after the deer and repeatedly took Shri Rama's name. Ravana tried to endear Her lovingly and even threatened Her when She showed resistance to his immoral attitude. Feeling insulted he left in a huff and ordered his sentries to keep Her under tight vigil.

Shri Rama and Laxmana go in search of Sita

In the forests as Shri Rama saw Laxmana coming towards Him, He asked Him why he had left Sita alone in the hut as he was supposed to guard Her against cruel demons who might be keeping an eye on them to seek vengeance. He had a premonition that they may not find Sita in the hut on their return. Laxmana explained to Him the circumstances that forced him to act against His instructions and obey Sita's orders. When they returned home, they found Sita missing. In perturbed state of mind, they looked around and called Her in all directions but received no response. Shri Rama was distressed like a common man. They enquired from the trees, the birds, the deer, and the bees, etc. but got no clue about Her whereabouts. They went to search Her in the woods. As they went on, they kept calling Her aloud but did not get any response.

Jattayu informs of Ravana having taken Sita

While wandering about in search of Sita, they found Jattayu lying on the ground, badly injured. He told Shri Rama that he had been waiting and fighting against death all the while to inform Him that Sita was in distress. He told him the entire story of how Ravana forcibly took Sita in the southern direction in his aerial chariot and how he fought with Ravana to save Sita. Jattayu considered himself fortunate to be near Shri Rama when death was haunting before him. Saying this, he breathed his last. Shri Rama sent him to His abode and told him not to tell Dashratha, His father that Sita had been abducted by Ravana and vowed that He would kill Ravana. The Ocean of compassion, Shri Rama Himself performed the last rites of Jattayu.

Shri Rama kills Kabandha

Shri Rama and Laxmana proceeded on. The forest was thick with trees, creepers and full of animals and birds. On their way they came across demon Kabandha and Shri Rama overthrew him. He prayed to Shri Rama and told Him of Dhurvasa's curse, which had got washed out on seeing Him. Shri Rama told Kabandha that He did not like enemies of Brahmins. He told him that one who does service to the Brahmin in thought, word and deed wins over Brahma, Shiva and Himself. Even though a Brahmin curses, beats or speaks harsh words, he is still worthy of being adored. Kabandha regained his old Gandharva form and ascended to the Heaven by the grace of Shri Rama.

Shri Rama meets Shabri

Shri Rama and Laxmana proceeding further in the southern direction, came to the hermitage of Shabri. Sage Matanga, who was Shabri's preceptor, had at the time of his passing away told Shabri that Shri Rama would visit her in the hermitage. As Shabri saw Shri Rama coming, she was delighted that her Guru's words had come true and her many years long wait and devotion for Him had at last borne fruit. She prostrated before the two brothers, welcomed them inside and made them sit so that they could take rest for a while. She brought some delicious roots, fruits and bulbs before them and offered only the sweet ones to both the brothers after taking the first bite herself and tasting them. Shabri told them that she being low in descent and dull-witted, found it hard to sing in praise of them. Shri Rama told her that He knew no kinship other than devotion. Caste, kinship, lineage, reputation, wealth, accomplishment, ability or strength are of no value to one if one is without devotion. He revealed to her nine forms of devotion (Navdha Bhakti) which are as follows:

* Fellowship with saints.
* Fondness of stories of Shri Rama.
* Service of one's preceptor.
* Singing in praise of Shri Rama.
* Muttering the name of Shri Rama.
* Practicing self control and virtue.
* Desisting from manifold activities and pursuing the course laid by saints.
* Contentment with what one has and not finding fault in others.
* Being guileless and straightforward and having faith in Shri Rama.

Shri Rama praised Shabri for her devotion in Himself. He enquired from her if she knew anything about Sita who had been forcibly taken away by Ravana and whom they were searching around in the forests. Shabri told them to proceed on to Pampa lake where they would find Sugriva, the Chief of monkeys. She advised Him to make friends with Sugriva as he was quite resourceful and would be able to render Him all help. Saying so, she fell at the feet of Shri Rama and cast off her body. Shri Rama sent her to His abode.

Reaching Pampa lake

While proceeding towards Pampa lake, Shri Rama narrated lots of stories to Laxmana. Among other things He told him that the three most formidable evils that exist are lust, anger and greed. The weapon of lust is woman, that of anger is harsh speech and that of greed being desire and hypocrisy. They saw the beautiful Pampa lake, took a bath in it and sat on its bank pondering at what to do next.

Narada meets Shri Rama

Narada, the wandering saint, saw Shri Rama and Laxmana sitting besides the Pampa lake. Their faces wore a gloomy look. Narada came and sat near them. He told Shri Rama that the Lord has many names each greater than the rest but he wished that the name "RAMA" should surpass all of them. Shri Rama replied that let it be so. Narada bowed and asked Shri Rama why did He not allow

him to marry when he wished so. Shri Rama said to Narada, "Lust, anger, greed and pride are one's strongest enemies. A woman gives much pain to a person for she, like a hot season, dries up ponds and lakes of japa and worship. A young woman is a source of sensuous pleasure and is the root of all evil. Bearing this in mind, I did not permit you to be married." Narada asked Shri Rama to explain to him as to how one could distinguish ordinary persons from saints. Shri Rama said, "Saints are masters who have control on six passions viz. lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and jealousy. They are sinless, pure, full of bliss and wisdom, desireless, disinterested, firm, moderate in diet, self-inspired, learned, devoted, ever united with God and conversant with righteousness i.e. Dharma. Nothing is dear to them except the name of Shri Hari. They are modest, discreet and always do good to others without any expectation for reward or any other consideration. They are also conversant with the Vedas and the prans. "Narada, feeling immense pleasure on hearing this from Shrī Rama, clasped His feet and left.

End of Aranya Kanda

Sant Tulsidas closes this Descent by suggesting that those who sing praises of Ravana's foe shall be rewarded with devotion to Shri Rama. According to him one should abandon lust and pride, sit in company of saints and worship Shri Rama.

*** End of Descent III ***

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SHRI RAMACHARITAMANASA (THE MANASAROVAR OF MIND CLEANSING DEEDS AND EXPLOITS OF SHRI RAMA)

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DESCENT - 4 (KISHIKINDHA KANDA)

"Neelotpal tan shyam kaam koti shobha adhik,
Suneya tasu gun gram jasu naam agha khaga badhik!"

..... (Shri Ramacharitamanasa, Descent - IV/30B)

(Listen to the praises of Shri Rama, who possesses a form dark as the blue lotus, who by His elegance extinguishes millions of Cupids and whose Name is a veritable fowler for birds in the shape of sins.)

Hanuman meets Shri Rama

Shri Rama and Laxmana proceeded further and reached Rishimukha hills, where dwelt Sugriva, the Chief of monkeys. As he learnt that two persons in hermit's robes were coming towards them, he was alarmed. However, he felt immeasurable strength gradually building up within himself as they came nearer. He asked Hanuman, the son of Wind God, to go in the disguise of a Brahmin and find out who they were and where they wanted to go. Hanuman went and met the two brothers on the hill side. He enquired as to who they were and

why were they roaming barefooted on the hills in the scorching heat of the Sun, unmindful of their beautiful and delicate figure. He enquired if they were one amongst the Trinity Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva or Nara and Narayan or the one who had come to free the Earth of the evil. Shri Rama introduced Himself and His brother Laxmana and explained to him that they were wandering about in search of Sita. Hanuman recognized Shri Rama, his Lord and fell at His feet. Overwhelmed with joy on having found his Lord, he began singing in praise of Shri Rama. He felt bad that he did not recognize his Lord at the very first sight. He told Shri Rama that he would serve Him all his life with full dedication and would henceforth place himself completely at the mercy of his Lord. Shri Rama clasped him and told Hanuman that he was twice as dear to Him as Laxmana.

Hanuman told Shri Rama, "Sugriva, the King of monkeys, lives on the summit of this hill. It is better to make friends with him. He will help in tracking down and restoring Mother Sita." He lifted the two brothers on his shoulders and took a big leap to the hill-top and took them to Sugriva.

<u>Shri Rama meets Sugriva</u>

On seeing Shri Rama, Sugriva - the Chief of monkeys, bowed his head and the two brothers embraced him. Hanuman lit a sacred fire and in its presence forged an alliance between Shri Rama and Sugriva. Laxmana related to Sugriva all that had happened with them and how they searched Sita everywhere after She was forcibly abducted by Ravana. Tears rolled down Sugriva's eyes as he heard their story and he promised that She would

certainly be traced out and brought back with full honour. Sugriva recalled, "One day while I was deliberating with my counsellors in the open, I saw a lady crying out 'Rama Rama' from inside a chariot flying overhead. She threw a scarf with some ornaments tied in it, probably having seen us by the hill side. We picked up the articles and have preserved these as such. " He gave the scarf to Shri Rama who recognized that the ornaments belonged to Sita. This grieved Him further. Sugriva consoled Him and instilled in Him a lot of hope and confidence and pledged to help Him trace Her.

Sugriva tells his story

Shri Rama enquired of Sugriva why he was hiding in the mountain cave. Sugriva related his entire story to Him. He said, "My brother Vali is very strong and powerful and we used to live together happily. One night a demon named Mayavi, who was the son of Maya, challenged Vali to fight with him. Courageous as Vali was, he could not brook such an open challenge from anybody. He went out to have a bout with Mayavi and I followed them quietly. Mayavi ran fast till he reached a mountain cave. Before entering the cave and closing its mouth shut with a big boulder, Vali told me to stay outside till he would kill Mayavi and if he did not come out within fifteen days he might conclude that he had been slain by the demon and should return home. I waited for a month and when I found a blood stream coming out of the cave I thought that Vali had been slain. I returned home completely disappointed and was persuaded to sit on the throne due to my brother's death. It, however, turned out that Vali actually

overpowered the demon and killed him in a prolonged fight, removed the boulder at the mouth of the cave and returned home. When he saw me on the throne he was mad with fury. He beat me hard, robbed me of my wife and all my possessions. He even threatened to kill me. Thenceforth, I started living in the mountain caves to save my life." Shri Rama was moved by his tale and promised him that He would kill Vali and restore him his wife and all his possessions. However, Sugriva cautioned Him that Vali had secured a boon that during of fight he would have half the strength of his opponent transferred in him.

Shri Rama kills Vali

Shri Rama told Sugriva that a stupid servant, a stingy monarch, a bad wife and a false friend bring great torment to a man. He gave him a lot of consolation and encouragement and told him, "Go to Vali and beckon him for a fight. We will see you fight from a close distance and the moment I find him overpowering you, I will kill Vali with a single deadly arrow." Shri Rama even demonstrated to Sugriva His proficiency in archery by felling down seven Palm trees, standing in a row, with a single arrow from His bow. Convinced and confident of Shri Rama's protection, Sugriva agreed to do so and went to Vali's Palace. He called out for Vali and challenged him to come for a fight. Vali's wife tried to restrain him from going, knowing that Sugriva was being accompanied by Shri Rama and Laxmana, under whom he had taken shelter. However, Vali did not pay any heed to her words and unable to restrain himself, he came out to teach Sugriva a lesson. The two brothers Vali and Sugriva

looked alike. Both of them were mighty and strong. They fought with each other valiantly but in the end Sugriva received a lot of beating from Vali. Shri Rama standing behind a tree could not shoot an arrow as the two looked alike and He could not make out who among the two vali. Sugriva retreated to save his life and ran to Shri Rama and Laxmana for their protection. Shri Rama placed a garland round his neck to distinguish him from Vali and sent him back to fight. They resumed their fight and getting a favourable chance Shri Rama shot His arrow from behind a tree which penetrated Vali's chest. Struck thus, Vali fell on the ground. He looked at Shri Rama standing a little away and said that he had realized the mission of his birth by having a sight of Him. However, with harsh words he questioned Shri Rama as to why He wanted to kill him when he bore no enmity with Him and why He resorted to such an unethical and cowardly way of eliminating him by hitting him from behind a tree. Shri Rama replied to Vali, "You have forcibly taken your younger brother's wife who is like your sister or daughter or daughter-in-law. Not only have you committed this sin but you were also proud of your power and strength. You never heeded to your wife when she forewarned you not to fight Sugriva disregarding that he had taken refuge under Me." Vali then told Shri Rama that though a sinner, he had now taken shelter under Him and was happy to have been killed by Him. Shri Rama forgave him and sent him to His abode, while granting him a boon of treating his son Angada as His own.

Sugriva crowned

Shri Rama instructed Sugriva and Angada to perform the last rites of Vali. When this was done He sent Laxmana to install Sugriva as the King of Kishikindha. As the rainy season had already set in, Shri Rama told Sugriva and Angada to look after their kingdom while He along with Laxmana would stay on in the caves on Pravarsana hills. The work of finding Sita was deferred till the rainy season was over. During this period they stayed in a cave, while the rainy season unfolded itself in different forms and Shri Rama related many stories from various scriptures to Laxmana.

Laxmana warns Sugriva to keep his promise

The rainy season was over, yet there was no news about Sita. Shri Rama was overwhelmed with anxiety about Her welfare and safety. He was keen to know Her whereabouts so as to rescue Her as soon as possible. He told Laxmana that Sugriva seemed to have forgotten to send his spies in search of Sita and instead had become intoxicated with royal luxuries and got engrossed in the lavish life-style with his own spouse and mistresses. Expressing his anger He said that in case he did not keep his word, He would kill him with the same arrow with which He had killed Vali. Perceiving Him to be angry, Laxmana took his bow and arrow and told Shri Rama that he would himself go and warn Sugriva. Shri Rama's anger soon withered away, He being an Ocean of compassion. He instructed Laxmana not to harm him in any way but only frighten him and get him along.

Hanuman himself sensed that Sugriva had forgotten that promise he had made to Shri Rama and went to remind him. Sugriva felt sorry that he had committed a great folly in forgetting his foremost duty to abide by his promise. He immediately instructed Hanuman to raise troops of monkeys and send them in various directions to search Sita. So envoys of monkeys were called and despatched to summon all the monkeys capable of undertaking the monumental task of searching Sita. While this was being done, Laxmana came in all fury, strung his bow and proclaimed that he would burn the entire city of Kishikindha with his 'Agni Shastra' if King Sugriva did not keep his word. While he was shouting, Angada came and bowed to him. The wrath of Laxmana was reported to Sugriva who sent Tara, his wife, and Hanuman to appease and welcome him. They did accordingly and escorted Laxmana to the Palace, where Sugriva bowed to him. Laxmana hugged Sugriva. Hanuman informed Laxmana that batched of envoys had already been sent in all directions to call monkeys and raise several search troops.

Sugriva, Hanuman and Angada went with Laxmana to Shri Rama. Sugriva apologized for having forgotten his prime duty and praised Shri Rama for showing mercy on him. Shri Rama smiled and advised Sugriva to lose no more time to trace Sita. Lots of monkeys arrived in the meantime and had a glimpse of Shri Rama. Sugriva ordered them to go in all directions and search out Sita within a month.

Search parties sent

Jambavan, Angada, Hanuman, Nala and Nila were sent in the south direction. They took leave of Sugriva and bowed to Shri Rama. Hanuman was the last to take leave and Shri Rama felt confident that the job would be accomplished only by him. He gave him His ring and told him to show it to Sita, comfort Her and appraise Her of the agony He was facing without Her and convey to Her that He would positively rescue Her.

Hanuman reaches the sea-shore

The various troops of monkeys set out in four directions. As they were proceeding ahead, Hanuman went up a hill and looked around. He saw lots of birds flying into a cave at the bottom of the hill. Hanuman led his troops into the cave. Inside the cave, they found a garden and a tank full of lotuses. Further ahead they saw a saintly lady absorbed in meditation. They bowed to her. She offered them water and on being asked by her they disclosed to her the purpose of their journey. She told them that it was not possible for anybody to come out of the cave once inside but as they were rendering service to Shri Rama they would find themselves outside the cave once they closed their eyes. She blessed them and assured them that they shall succeed in their search for Sita. As soon as they closed their eyes, they found themselves on the sea-shore. Angada and others thought that they had made no progress thus far and feared that they would meet death at the hands of Sugriva upon their return, having failed in their mission. Jambavan consoled them and in order to pep up their spirits he related many

thought provoking stories. He also told Angada that Shri Rama was no ordinary person and he should not regard Him as a mortal but Brahama Himself - the Invincible and the Unborn.

Hanuman meets Sampati

While they were talking amongst themselves and trying to decide what to do next, Sampati who was in a cave nearby came out and saw a host of monkeys. They ran away out of fear thinking that the huge vulture might devour them. Angada suddenly remarked that there was no vulture more blessed than Jattayu who laid his life for the service of Shri Rama. When Sampati heard his younger brother Jattayu's name, he enquired about him. After learning about Jattayu's valiant effort to save Sita at the cost of his own life, he requested them to take him to the shore so that he could offer last rites to his departed brother. Sampati performed the last rites and wished peace to his brother's soul. Later he told them of his own exploits and recounted how in an effort to reach the Sun he had his wings scorched down when he flew close to the Sun and fell on the ground where he was nursed by a Sage. Sampati informed them that Sita had forcibly been taken by Ravana to Lanka. He told them that vultures have sharp sight and he could see that Sita was presently lodged at Ravana's favourite Ashoka Garden in Lanka.

Hanuman asked to go to Ashoka Garden

Jambavan, Angada, Nala, Nila and other monkeys started discussing about how to cross the ocean. They were all disheartened for none of them was able to do so. However, suddenly they were reminded of Hanuman who was meditating all alone at a distance. Jambavan approached Hanuman with others and told him that he was brave, wise and capable of jumping across the ocean being the son of the Wind God. Jambavan begged an excuse for not being able to do so presently as he was pretty old. He told him that he was young when the Lord assumed the form of Vamana and had encircled the Earth three times. He told Hanuman to take a leap across the ocean, search out Sita and accomplish Shri Rama's work. He said that it would bring laurels to their team and when they go and report to Shri Rama about Sita's welfare and whereabouts, He would be very happy. He said that by doing so their life's mission to serve Him would be accomplished. He emphasized that until Sita was traced in Lanka, it would not be possible for Shri Rama to go there with a large number of monkeys and bears, exterminate Ravana and the demons, rescue Sita and bring Her back with due honour.

End of Kishikindha Kanda

Tulsidas closes the Descent by saying that those who read or hear stories of Shri Rama attain the Supreme state and all their desires get fulfilled.

*** End of Descent IV ***

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SHRI RAMACHARITAMANASA (THE MANASAROVAR OF MIND CLEANSING DEEDS AND EXPLOITS OF SHRI RAMA)

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DESCENT - 5 (SUNDARA KANDA)

"Sunu sut tohi urin mai nahin,
Dekheon kari vichar man maahin;
Puni puni Kapihi chitav surtrata,
Lochan neer pulak ati gaata!"

..... (Shri Ramacharitamanasa, Descent - V/32-4)

("Listen, my son (Hanuman), after giving considerable thought in my mind, I have concluded that I cannot repay the debt I owe you." Again and again as the Protector of Gods (Shri Rama) gazed on Hanuman His eyes filled with tears and His body was overpowered with a thrill of emotion.)

Hanuman flies across the Ocean

Hanuman was delighted at heart when Jambavan reminded him of his capabilities and told him to accomplish the job. He asked them to wait for him at the sea-shore till his return and uttering the name of Shri Rama he took a big leap. The God of Ocean wishing him success, requested the God of mountains,

Mainaka, to ensure that Hanuman does not get tired. He touched Mainaka with his foot and continued his flight telling Him that he could not rest until he accomplished his job. As the Gods saw Hanuman leaping across the Ocean, They decided to test his extraordinary strength and intelligence. They sent Surasa, the mother of serpents to interrupt Hanuman. As Hanuman came near her, she opened her big mouth to eat him up. Hanuman pleaded her to leave him alone, being in a hurry to accomplish an important task, but Surasa said that nobody could pass the way without entering her mouth first. Hanuman told her that if she was adamant to eat him up then he would oblige her. Hanuman increased his size and became bigger than her mouth. As she opened her mouth further, Hanuman also increased his own size correspondingly. Seeing her mouth wide open, Hanuman swiftly dwarfed his size, went inside her mouth and came out as swiftly. He then begged her to be left off as he had already fulfilled her wish by entering her mouth. Surasa was impressed by Hanuman's strength and wisdom. She told him that she merely wanted to test him. She blessed him saying that he would certainly accomplish Shri Rama's work.

A demoness, who dwelt in the Ocean and would catch flying birds by her trick, tried to trap him. He understood her trick and killed her in no time.

Hanuman enters Ashoka Garden

Crossing the Ocean thus, Hanuman landed on a high hill. He looked around and saw the charming city with a golden Palace. He went close to the Palace and found a number of guards on watch. He assumed a dwarf size and entered the city. A demoness named Lankini confronted him at the Gate. He, at once, took his normal form and gave her a blow. She toppled down and begged for his mercy. She recalled that once Brahma, having granted Ravana the boon for undertaking an austere penance, had told her that when a monkey would give her a blow she should assume that the race of demons was not far from being wiped out. She felt blessed having been hit by Shri Rama's own messenger. She told him to enter the city and accomplish the work.

Hanuman again assumed a dwarf size and jumped from one building to another but could not locate Sita. He saw a building with an attached temple where a picture of Shri Rama was hanging. Hanuman thought that it must surely belong to Shri Rama's devotee from whom he would be able to get some information about Sita's whereabouts. He entered the house after taking the form of a Brahmin. Vibhishana came out and enquired about his credentials. Hanuman disclosed his real identity and related the entire story of Shri Rama. They talked at length about the grace of Shri Rama. Vibhishana informed Hanuman that Sita was lodged in Ashoka Garden which was heavily guarded and explained how he could see Her.

Hanuman went to the Ashoka garden, climbed up a tree and concealed himself behind tree leaves. Suddenly he found Ravana along with a number of woman

including Mandhodari, his wife, coming upto Sita who was sitting meekly under a tree. Ravana proposed to Sita and said that he would give Her all the pleasures and luxuries of life if She agreed to be his consort. He promised that he would make Mandhodari and all other Queens Her handmaids. Sita rebuked him in strong terms and warned him that he would perish at the hands of Shri Rama for committing such a grave sin. Feeling insulted, Ravana threatened Sita that he would kill Her by his sword. Sita again insulted him saying, "You should be ashamed that you kidnapped Me in the absence of Shri Rama. Had He been there He would have killed you then and there. Either Shri Rama's arms would be around My neck, or else your sword. I am not afraid of death but would never submit to a wretch that you are." Hearing this Ravana drew his sword to behead Her but Mandhodari intervened and pacified him. Bubbling with anger he ordered the demonesses on guard to intimidate Sita in every way and pronounced that he would wait for one more month for Sita's consent failing which he would kill Her. Having issued these instructions Ravana left.

<u>Trijata's dream</u>

Trijata was one of the demonesses on guard. She was wise and devoted to Shri Rama. She collected all her companions and told them that she had seen an awe-inspiring dream. She had dreamt that a monkey had entered Lanka and burnt it, Ravana was clean shaven riding a donkey with his twenty arms chopped off, the demon forces were killed, Vibhishana was in command and the city was all in praise of Shri Rama. She told them

that this dream would definitely come out true sooner or later and advised them to serve Sita and in turn bless themselves. Trijata was very kind and good to Sita. As she went upto Sita the latter sought her help in arranging wood and fire so that She could immolate herself. Trijata consoled Her. She related to Her what she had dreamt of and went away.

Hanuman meets Sita

Hanuman was watching all this distressfully from the tree and finding Sita alone he dropped the ring given to him by Shri Rama. Sita picked it up recognizing it at the first sight and was extremely delighted. But She became pensive again thinking it might be a conjuring trick (Maya) being played on Her. However, She believed that no one could conquer the invincible Lord of Maya - Shri Rama. While She was thinking all this, Hanuman, singing praises of Shri Rama and His ballad, alighted from the tree and stood before Sita with folded hands. He told Her that he was Shri Rama's messenger and that the ring had been given by Him to lay all Her doubts about him to rest. He apprised Her of Shri Rama's and Laxmana's welfare. He told Her how sad they had been ever since they did not find Her in the hut and how he along with his search party wandered through forests in search of Her till they reached close to the sea-shore where they learnt about Her whereabouts. She believed the messenger was genuine and an ardent devotee of Shri Rama. She enquired about the welfare of Shri Rama and Laxmana and whether She could ever see them

again. Seeing tears in Her eyes Hanuman gave Her Shri Rama's message saying that He missed Her badly and always thought of Her, Hanuman told Her that had Shri Rama known that She was here He would have reached Her much earlier and taken Her with Himself. He told Her that he himself could take Her to Shri Rama but was not directed by Shri Rama to do so. Sita was pleased and blessed Hanuman.

<u>Hanuman uproots trees in Ashoka garden</u>

Hanuman felt hungry. He saw many fruit trees in the garden. He sought Sita's permission to have some fruits before returning to Kishikindha which She readily granted. He climbed up many trees and had a variety of choicest fruits. After satiating his hunger, he started uprooting trees. The warriors on guard challenged Him, but he killed them one by one. Ravana was informed about it and he sent his champions and more warriors. Hanuman killed many of them while the others ran away to save their lives. Ravana became angry and sent Aksha, his son with more warriors. Hanuman threw a big tree on them killing many of them. Even Aksha could not face him and was killed. Rest of his soldiers fled to the Palace to inform Ravana of the monkey's fury. Being furious at the failure of his warriors to contain Hanuman, Ravana sent his son Meghanada, who was mighty and called 'Indrajit', the Conqueror of Indra. Ravana instructed him not to kill the monkey but only bind him and bring him to the court so that they could find out where he had came from.

Meghanada subdues Hanuman

There was a very tough fight between Hanuman and Meghanada. With a blow from Hanuman, Meghanada fell unconscious. In the meantime Hanuman climbed up a tree. When Meghanada regained consciousness after sometime he yelled like thunder at Hanuman and shot a Brahmastra (weapon presided over by Brahma) at him. Submitting to the glory of Lord Brahma's weapon, Hanuman faced it without defence and fell down on the ground. He got entangled with serpents released from this weapon and was carried to the court of Ravana. After interrogating him Ravana learnt that he was a messenger of Shri Rama. Hanuman appraised Ravana of Shri Rama's greatness, strength and exploits. He advised him to return Sita to Shri Rama and apologize to Him. When Hanuman condemned Ravana for his cowardly act of deceitfully abducting Sita, some champions in the court lunged forth to hit him but Vibhishana intercepted them saying that it was unethical to attack a messenger.

Hanuman burns Lanka

Ravana asked his courtiers to suggest a suitable punishment for Hanuman for devastating the beautiful Ashoka garden and killing guards and stalwarts including his son. They unanimously decided to let him off after burning his tail considered to be very dear to a monkey. They tied a cloth soaked in kerosene oil at the end of his tail, lit it with fire and let him free. Hanuman ran and sprang from Palace to Palace and with the breeze assisting, he set them on fire one after the other with his burning tail.

Soon the entire city and palaces were on fire and he himself went unscathed due to Shri Rama's grace. He finally leapt into the Ocean to extinguish the fire on his tail. Thereafter he assumed his normal form and went to Sita again to take some token from Her for Shri Rama as he had brought one for Her. She unfastened a jewel on Her head and gave it to Hanuman. She asked him to convey Her obeisance to Shri Rama and reqest Him to relieve Her of the agony and distress. She told him that if Shri Rama did not rescue Her from Ravana's clutches within a month, She would either be done away with by him or forced to commit suicide. Hanuman bowed before Sita and leapt into the sky, making a loud roar which terrified the citizens of Lanka and caused miscarriage to all pregnant ladies. He crossed the Ocean and met Angada and others who were waiting for him. They were all thrilled to learn that Hanuman had succeeded in his mission. They went to report to Sugriva of the accomplishment of the job entrusted to them, after having delicious fruits at Madhubana, the garden owned by Sugriva.

Shri Rama is given Sita's jewel

Shri Rama was informed that the job was accomplished mainly by Hanuman and He embraced him and others. Hanuman handed over to Shri Rama the jewel Sita had given him and also conveyed Her message. He also reported to Him how he had burnt the entire city of Lanka. Shri Rama was highly pleased with Hanuman and told him, "I will always remain indebted to you for what you have done for Me. No one, a human being, a Sage or a God has ever put Me under such obligation."

Hanuman bowed to Shri Rama and begged for His unceasing devotion which is the source of supreme bliss.

Shri Rama asked Sugriva to make the necessary preparations for waging a war on Ravana. Hosts of monkeys were called and they bowed to Shri Rama. As they set off, Sita experienced some good omens and sensed that Shri Rama must have started the march to rescue Her. They all reached the sea front and halted there.

Ravana turns down plea from Mandhodari and Vibhishana

Mandhodari begged of Ravana to release Sita and send Her back to Shri Rama or else it would bring them a lot of grief and suffering. She reminded him how an ordinary messenger of Shri Rama, a monkey, had set their palaces and the city to fire. Ravana was in no mood to follow her advice. Vibhishana also begged of Ravana to give up lust forewarning him of dire consequences as Shri Rama was no ordinary man but the sole Lord of fourteen spheres. He told him that lust, anger, vanity and covetousness are paths leading to hell and it is best to abjure these and bow to Shri Rama. An old and wise minister Malyavan endorsed Vibhishana's sincere opinion and advice. However, Ravana condemned both for eulogizing his enemy. Vibhishana again begged of Ravana to use wisdom and not be perverse. He told him that Vedas and Puranas declare that wisdom and foolishness dwell in the heart of all and those who use wisdom prosper and those who adopt foolishness face misfortune. Ravana could not stand these pleas any longer from Vibhishana and kicked him saying that a

coward like him had better join these hermits he talked about. With a broken heart Vibhishana departed from Lanka for good, breaking all his relations with him. Through his 'mays' he flew across the Ocean to take refuge at the feet of Shri Rama.

Vibhishana goes to Shri Rama

When the monkeys saw Vibhishana, they caught him taking him for a spy and brought him to Sugriva, who reported the matter to Shri Rama. Sugriva sought Shri Rama's permission to imprison Vibhishana but Shri Rama forbade him to do so and instead suggested that he should be produced before Him so that the purpose of his visit could be known. So Vibhishana was brought in. He introduced himself as Ravana's brother Vibhishana, born of a demon race and revealed that he had come to seek protection at the feet of Shri Rama, the dissipator of the fear of rebirth. Saying so, he prostrated before Shri Rama who lifted him up and clasped him. He made him sit by His side and heard his sad story. Shri Rama replied, "If a man, who may even have been My enemy, seeks My protection and discards vanity, infatuation, hypocrisy and trickery, he at once becomes a saint. Those who do good to others and are righteous and steadfast in their vow to serve the Brahmins and worship Me are dear to Me." Seeing his devotion towards Him, Shri Rama applied a `tilak' of sea water on his forehead as a sacred mark of his sovereignty over Lanka. He conferred same boons on Vibhishana which Lord Shiva had conferred on Ravana when he had offered all his ten heads to Him.

The Ocean had to be crossed to reach Lanka and rescue Sita. Shri Rama sat on the sea shore to invoke the God of Ocean to help them in crossing the Ocean. Ravana's two spies came that very moment assuming false appearance of monkeys. They were recognized and beaten. When Laxmana noticed it, he took pity and asked the two spies to return to their master and tell Ravana to surrender Sita or else perish at their hands. He also gave them a note for Ravana. They crossed over to Lanka and reported to Ravana that Vibhishana had joined Shri Rama, who applied the mark of sovereignty on his forehead they further informed him that their army was huge in number comprising of monkeys and bears amongst whom were lots of champions viz. Dwivida, Mainda, Nila, Nala, Angada, Gada, Vikatasya, Dadimukha, Kesari, Vishata, Shata, Jambavan and Hanuman. They cautioned him that Shri Rama's arrows had terrific power which could even dry up the sea and presently on the advice of Vibhishana He was invoking the Lord of ocean to seek a passage across the Ocean. They informed him that their troops were in high spirits and confident that they would crush the tenheaded Ravana and reduce him to dust. When Ravana heard all this and read the note sent by Laxmana, he laughed with a scorn. The messenger whose name was Shuka, having seen Shri Rama and Laxmana, and their armies himself, begged of Ravana to believe all that had been reported to him and prayed to him to avoid the battle by returning Sita to them. Ravana kicked out Shuka as he had done to Vibhishana. Shuka fled and went to Shri Rama, bowed to him and took refuge at His feet. Shuka, who had become a demon due to agastya's curse, regained his original state of an enlightened Sage by the grace of Shri Rama.

Shri Rama meditated for three days to invoke the God of Ocean but did not receive any response to His prayers. This infuriated Shri Rama and He told Laxmana that the God of Ocean did not seem to accept His friendship and prayer. He asked him to fetch His bow and arrows so that He could shoot an 'Agni' missile that would dry up the Ocean and enable them to cross over. He told him that making friends with a rogue, submitting before an idiot, inculcating liberality on a born miser, talking wisdom to one who is drowned in worldliness, expecting dispassion from a greedy person are as good as sowing seeds in a barren land. As soon as He charged the 'Agni' arrow on His bow, there was scare in all the sea-creatures and the God of Sea, in all nervousness came out and pleaded for mercy and assured Shri Rama that he would abide by His command. Shri Rama smiled and asked for a way so that they could have a passage across the Ocean. The Ocean God told Him that Nala and Nila had got a boon in their childhood that whatever they touched, even though it may be a stone, would float on water and with their help the Ocean could be bridged. Shri Rama withdrew His arrow. The God of Ocean and the sea-creatures heaved a sigh of relief.

<u>End of Sundara Kanda</u>

Sant Tulsidas concludes this descent by saying that one who recites the virtues of Shri Rama is bestowed with all blessings and those who hear them reverently cross the Ocean of mundane existence.

*** End of Descent V ***

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SHRI RAMACHARITAMANASA (THE MANASAROVAR OF MIND CLEANSING DEEDS AND EXPLOITS OF SHRI RAMA)

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DESCENT - 6

(LANKA KANDA)

"Sangram bhumi biraj Raghupati atul bal kausal dhani,
Shram bindhu mukh rajeev lochan arun tan se nit kani;
Bhuj jugal pherat sar sarasan bhalu kapi chahu disi baney,
Keha Das Tulsi kahi na sak chhabi Sesha jehi anan ghaney!"

..... (Shri Ramacharitamanasa, Descent - VI/71-Chhanda)

(The Lord of the Raghus, the King of Kosala, who was matchless in strength, shone resplendent on the battle field in the midst of bears and monkeys, with drops of perspiration on His face, His lotus eyes turned red and His person specked with particles of blood, and both His hands busy playing with His bow and arrow. Even Shesha (the Serpent God), says Tulsidas, could not describe the Lord's beauty despite His numerous tongues.)

Bridging the Ocean

Shri Rama told Sugriva to order his troops to collect stones etc. for Nala and Nila to throw them into the sea. The monkeys started collecting stones, boulders, trees and whatever they came across and passed them on to Nala and Nila who threw them into the sea. Everything

they touched floated and gradually a bridge got formed. They made the bridge strong and to the liking of Shri Rama.

Shri Rama expressed a desire of setting up a Shiva temple at the site where the bridge formation was started. A lingam was placed amidst chanting of appropriate prayers. Shri Rama said, "No one is as dear to Me as Lord Shiva and any one who bears enmity with Him can never attain Me. Any one who visits this Shiva temple shall after his death ascends My heavenly abode, and one who pours water of river Ganges on this lingam shall be liberated." This place is till today called Rameshwaram.

As they walked over the bridge, the sea-creatures floated to have a glimpse of Shri Rama. A huge crowd of monkeys walked on the bridge, some even jumped across. As they reached the other shore, they settled down and all monkeys and bears were asked to look around for food and eat to their fill. Wherever monkeys came across demons they cut their nose and ears and let them go. When this news reached Ravana, he got a scare as he doubted whether the Ocean could ever be crossed by Shri Rama and His troops. Mandhodari again pleaded with him to give up animosity with Shri Rama. She told him that Shri Rama was an incarnation of God and it would be proper for him to surrender Sita. She fell at his feet and requested him to avoid a confrontation to safeguard her union with him for all time to come. Ravana's ego got the better of him and did not allow him to heed her advice and he left for the council chamber. Mandhodari was now convinced that Ravana's end was certain.

Ravana rebukes Prahasta

In the council, Ravana heard all the ministers singing to his tune. However, his son Prahasta rose and said that the ministers were stupid. He advised Ravana that it was the best for them to bow before Shri Rama and return Sita to Him in order to avoid war. He said that if Shri Rama returned with Sita, then he should make alliance with Him and if He did not, then there was no alternative but to face Him boldly. Ravana scorned at his son's words and the latter left the council in a huff and went home.

Shri Rama's and Ravana's Camp

Ravana fond of reveling in luxuries, went to his Palace on the hill top where demon songsters began to sing in his praise and demon nymphs began to dance.

On the other side, Shri Rama's army encamped on Mount Suvela. Shri Rama sat on a seat decorated with flowers by Laxmana. Being a moonlit night, He asked Sugriva, Vibhishana, Laxmana, Hanuman and Angada who were sitting close by to look at the moon. He asked them, "Why there are dark spots on the moon?" Sugriva said, "It is due to the reflection of shadow of the Earth on the moon." Someone said that the scar was left on the moon due to Rahu having struck it. Another said that the essence of moon was taken out by Brahma and bestowed on Rati, the consort of Kama - the God of Love. Shri Rama told them that poison who was moon's most beloved brother had lodged it in his heart and is diffusing his envenomed rays which torment parted lovers. Hanuman, however, said, "Moon is Your beloved servant

and it is Your image enshrined in his heart that gives it dark patches." Amidst this discussion they heard the singing and music from the hill-top facing them. Vibhishana informed Shri Rama that in a big hall over there, Ravana and Mandhodari were enjoying music and dance. Shri Rama sent an arrow which hit and smashed a dome of the hall. Ravana's crown and Mandhodari's ear rings fell with its bang. They got surprised as to how it had happened in the absence of storm but most of them took it as a bad omen. They all dispersed in fear. Mandhodari perceived that it must have been done by Shri Rama. Hence, she again begged of Ravana to give up animosity with Shri Rama, but he scoffed at her saying that he was invincible.

Angada sent as Emissary

In Shri Rama's camp it was decided that Angada be sent as an envoy to make a last attempt to persuade Ravana to submit an apology to Shri Rama and return Sita with due honour in order to avoid bloodshed. Bowing to Shri Rama, Angada went to meet Ravana. En route he was challenged by Prahasta who in the process tried to kick him. Angada caught his leg, swung him and threw him on the ground. All the demons ran away out of fear thinking that the same monkey who had burnt Lanka had returned and they went to report the incident to Ravana. Angada reached the Palace and was ushered in.

Ravana was seated on a throne over a high pedestal in his council hall. Angada walked in gracefully and all ministers etc. stood up which Ravana did not like. Ravana, however, remained seated. He enquired from

the envoy as to who he was. Angada introduced himself as the son of Vali, who was a friend of Ravana. He at first praised Ravana for having got lots of boons from Lord Shiva and Lord Brahma. He added that it was, howeve, unbecoming of him to indulge in the wilful and vicious act of taking away Sita deceitfully. He suggested to Ravana that he had better return Sita and beg an apology from Shri Rama. Ravana was annoyed at the suggestion and boasted that he had once lifted Mount Kailash and even defeated Lord Indra to become the King of the three Spheres. Ravana wished why Angada's mother had not aborted when she conceived. Ravana enquired about Vali's welfare. Angada replied that he would anyway meet him in ten days time and come to know about it. Angada advised him not to brag about his power and strength and recollect how only a subject of Sugriva had burnt Lanka in one go. Angada ridiculed Ravana saying that he had heard that one Ravana tried to defeat Bali, the King of Nether World, but was tied to the stables by children out of sport and was later rescued and released by Bali out of compassion. Angada said that another monster-like Ravana was discovered by Sahasrabahu as a strange creature with ten heads and was taken home by him for play and was later got released by Sage Pulastya. He added that yet another Ravana was the one who was held tight by Vali under his arm until he had finished his meditation. Ravana though disturbed by Angada's words again boasted about his might, recounting how he had once lifted Mount Kailash and how the whole Earth trembled under his feet as he walked. He threatened that he had Kumbhakarna as his brother and Meghanada as his son who were invincible and

known for their might and valour. He said that mere construction of a bridge across the Ocean was no big feat. Ravana claimed that there was no one who equalled his strength and power. He told him that when he offered his heads in prayer to Lord Shiva, he saw the decree of Providence on his brow that he would die only at the hands of a mortal and dismissed even this due to his pride and ego.

Angada pleaded with Ravana to apologize to Shri Rama for committing a grave sin of forcibly abducting Sita and persuaded him to return Her. He told him that even he himself was capable of setting Her free but since his assignment was that of a messenger he would not do so. Ravana abused Shri Rama at which Angada became furious and hit the ground with both hands. The Earth shook and persons sitting in Ravana's assembly were thrown off their seats. Even Ravana was short of being thrown off as he stood and balanced himself but his crowns fell on the ground. Ravana collected some of the crowns, yet Angada swiftly picked up a few of them and flung them away. These crowns landed before Shri Rama and were promptly picked up by Hanuman. Ravana ordered his guards to catch and kill him. Angada smiled and warned him that he had no idea of his strength. He told Ravana that inspite of his twenty eyes he was blind and could not see the greatness of Shri Rama. He placed his foot firmly on the ground and asked him if there was anyone in the assembly who could lift his leg. He challenged that if it was done, they would assume that Sita had been lost and would return without Her. Many champions in the assembly tried to lift Angada's leg but could not succeed. Even Meghanada failed to do so. Everybody hung his head in shame and feeling his own

honour and esteem at stake, Ravana himself stood up to prove him wrong. As he knelt down to hold Angada's ankle and lift his leg, Angada stepped backwards telling Ravana how foolish he was to touch his feet rather than that of the Almighty and all-merciful Shri Rama. The ten-headed monster was completely outwitted and returned to his seat biting his teeth. Angada departed and Ravana returned to his palace where Mandhodari again pleaded with him to compromise with Shri Rama and avoid a fight with Him. She reminded him that Laxmana drew only a simple line on the ground and he could not cross it when he went to take away Sita deceitfully. She said that they already had seen the strngth of His messenger and Shri Rama was no ordinary person but the Master of the Universe. She advised him to cultivate friendship with Him. She also reminded hi how Shri Rama broke Lord Shiva's bow which he failed to do. She also reminded him about how Laxmana chopped off Shrupanadha's nose and ears and how Shri Rama killed mighty Khara, Dushana, Trisira and Vali. Ravana heard all the pleas of Mandhodari for the night but was not moved. Next morning, he went to the assembly.

Angada returned to his camp and straightaway went to the place where Shri Rama, Sugriva, etc. were waiting for him. He narrated to them all the details of his meeting with Ravana and the conversations he had with Ravana. He told them how he quickly lifted and threw off the four crowns that fell off Ravana's head namely Conciliation (Sama), gift (Dhana), punishment (Dhanada) and division (Bheda). He said that these virtues are the pedestals of statesmanship and these landed straight at Shri Rama's feet as Ravana lacked all these. He also

revealed to them the strategic layout of the fort of Lanka and Ravana's intentions to fight them. Thereupon Shri Rama directed that they should attack Lanka on all its four Gates simultaneously.

Shri Rama attacks Ravana

Four brigades were formed with efficient generals leading them. They all bowed to Shri Rama and started shouting, yelling and hailing Shri Rama. They launched the attack accompanied by Laxmana and Sugriva. Ravana also ordered his demon troops to launch a counter offensive and have a good food of monkeys and bears. The monkeys and bears had an upper hand and created disruption in the rank and file of demons who began retreating. This annoyed Ravana and he ordered that he would kill whoever returned from the battle field like a coward fearing for life. Therefore, the demons had no choice but to return and fight. As these demons returned with fresh arms, they challenged monkeys and bears with iron bludgeons and tridents. The monkeys and bears were now stricken with terror. However, on the Western Gate, where Meghanada was in command, Hanuman was faced with an uphill task of breaking the Gate open. When the Gate did not break, Hanuman let out a loud roar, flew up with a huge stone and threw it on top of the chariot carrying Meghanada and completely crushed it. Meghanada was thrown off and many others were killed. Fearing Hanuman, they carried Meghanada home in a different chariot. Hanuman flew on top of the Palaces of Lanka. Angada followed to lend him support. They sang praises of Shri Rama and shook the

Palace domes so violently that Ravana and the ladies inside the palaces were awe-stricken. They crushed whoever came their way and told them that they were meeting such fate as a result of their animosity for Shri Rama.

As the evening set in, Hanuman and Angada returned and met Shri Rama. The monkeys also followed them. The demons, however, tricked them and came in for an attack against all norms of warfare practice. The monkeys having been caught unawares suffered heavily in darkness. Wind and downpour of blood, stones and ashes was created by the illusive powers of Akampana and Atikaya, the sons of Ravana, who were heading the demon forces. Shri Rama perceived through their trick, summoned Hanuman and Angada and informed them about it and directed them to proceed immediately to rescue their forces. Shri Rama sent an arrow which created light bringing a lot of relief to the monkey warriors. Seeing Hanuman and Angada coming, the demon forces retreated, but monkeys caught many of them and bit them to death. Then they all returned and bowed to Shri Rama and were relieved of all their fatigue.

Ravana expels Malyavan

Ravana called a meeting of his Ministers in his court who informed him of those killed besides almost half of his troops having got wiped out. Malyavan, an aged demon who happened to be Ravana's maternal grand father and an illustrious counsellor, addressed the meeting deploring Ravana for having abducted Sita and holding him responsible for all ill omens that had been occurring one after the other ever since he had committed the sinful

act. He pleaded with Ravana to give up enmity with Shri Rama, whose glory is sung in Vedas and Puranas and to return Sita. He reminded Ravana that Shri Rama is the Lord who had killed Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakashpa as well as Madhu and Kaitabha. Ravana called his aged maternal grand father a wretch and turned him away. He pardoned him from death at his hands due to his old age. Malyavan walked out of the assembly in utter disgust and abused Ravana warning him that his death was imminent.

Meghanada injures Laxmana

Meghanada went to the battle field after assuring his father that he would do some wonders there. He challenged Shri Rama, Laxmana, Nala, Nila, Dwivida, Sugriva, Angada and Hanuman. He also challenged Vibhishana calling him a traitor and asked all of them to come and fight. So saying, he showered arrows which flew like snakes. These arrows killed a large number of monkeys and bears. Hanuman, on seeing the plight of monkeys, flung a huge rock on Meghanada which he avoided by levitating himself up in the air, leaving his chariot. The rock fell on the chariot and it perished along with the charioteer and horses. Hanuman pursued him but Meghanada avoided facing him by disappearing and reappearing at his will. Meghanada approached Shri Rama and showered abuses on Him. He flew up and showered fire, bones, hair, faeces and other odd things. Shri Rama broke the illusive powers of Meghanada with an arrow. Laxmana along with Angada set forth to fight him taking permission of Shri Rama. A terrible fight

ensued. Clouds of dust billowed up as monkeys and bears fought with the demons. A lot of demons got crushed filling the furrows on earth with their blood. Laxman and Meghanada got engaged in a fierce fight. Meghanada was nearly overpowered to the extent that he thought he would be caught alive by the opponents. Finding himself nearly cornered he threw, as a last resort, a javelin which struck hard on Laxmana's chest and he fell unconscious. Meghanada tried to lift him up but failed to do so as Laxmana is none other than Lord Shesha, the Serpent God who supports the entie Universe on His head. Unable ot lift him, Meghanada and demons returned as sunset had already taken place. Hanuman carried Laxmana, still lying unconscious, and took him to Shri Rama. Shri Rama was distressed to see Laxmana in unconscious state. He wanted Laxmana to recover immediately. Vibhishana recommended that Susena, the physician from Lanka, should somehow be brought as he alone was capable of treating Laxmana.

Hanuman saves Laxmana's life

Hanuman set out for Lanka after assuming a diminutive form and brought Susena along with the house he lived in as he showed reluctance to go with him. After examining Laxmana's condition he prescribed the "Sanjeevni", a herb available only at Dhaulagiri mountain, and wanted the same to be brought immediately before dawn. Hanuman, the son of Wind God, went leaping across the seas and mountains to locate the mountain and the herb in the Himalayas. Spies conveyed to Ravana that Laxmana was in critical condition and that Hanuman was on his way to get the herb.

Ravana summoned kalanemi, a demon ally, and ordered him to obstruct Hanuman and prevent him from getting the herb. Kalanemi knew that no one could stop Hanuman, therefore, he also pleaded with Ravana to compromise with Shri Rama and adore His feet Ravana realized that he had better do what he was told and die at the hands of the Wind God's son instead of the demon King Ravana. So he proceeded to carry out Ravana's rders and by his black magic created a lake, garden and a temple on the route Hanuman had to follow. He himself sat inside the temple in the garb of a hermit and began singing in praise of Shri Rama. Hanuman was enchanted to see the temple and the lake and hear Shri Rama's devotional song while flying overhead. He decided to halt for a little while to drink water, have a glimpse of Shri Rama's devotee and simultaneously remove his fatigue. He approached the hermit and sought his permission to drink water. The hermitm (demon Kalanemi) sang praises of Shri Rama in order to delude Hanuman and wile away his time. Hanuman sat before him and was told that he could see what was happening in Lanka and predicted confidently that ultimately Shri Rama would be victorious. He permitted Hanuman to take a plunge into the lake and quench his thirst. No sooner did Hanuman dive into the lake than an alligator appeared all of a sudden and caught his leg. Hanuman killed the alligator who assumed a celestial form and soared to the Heaven. She thanked Hanuman for having been relieved from the curse of a sage which caused her to take birth from an alligator's womb. She told him that the fellow masquerading as a hermit was a demon in reality. So Hanuman returned to the temple and killed the demon by tossing him on

the rocks. The demon Kalanemi died muttering "Rama! Rama! "

Hanuman proceeded further and located the specific mountain where the herb grew. He, however, could not identify the particular herb asked for and therefore, lifted the entire mountain and started his return flight. As he passed over Ayodhya, Bharata saw a colossal figure flying across the sky and mistook it for a demon. He shot an arrow in the sky and Hanuman dropped on the ground crying "Rama! Rama! the Lord of Raghus!" Bharata, on hearing the monkey muttering Shri Rama's name, went near him. He prayed to Shri Rama to bring the monkey back to conscious state. His prayer was granted and Hanuman opened his eyes and stood up. Bharata clasped the monkey. On being asked by him, Hanuman related all that had happened with Sita, Shri Rama and Laxmana. Bharata did not want to detain Hanuman any longer and told him to proceed before it was too late.

As Hanuman reached Lanka, he found Shri Rama wailing like an ordinary mortal, saying how could he face the world and mothers, in particular, if he lost His brother for the sake of His wife. Seeing Hanuman with the mountain full of herbs, He calmed down. Susena plucked the particular herb (Sanjeevni) and applied it on Laxmana. Soon thereafter Laxmana was restored to conscious state. Shri Rama embraced His brother and everyone in their camp was full of joy. Susena was safely carried back to Lanka by Hanuman in the same way as he was brought by him.

Ravana approaches Kumbhakarna

Ravana was greatly upset to learn about Hanuman's successful mission and Laxmana's revival. So he decide to call Kumbhakarna. He went to his elder brother Kumbhakarna and told him how he had carried away Sita and the ensuing events in which he had lost a number of demons, champions amongst them and many of his sons. Kumbhakarna told Ravana that he had not done well in carrying away Sita who was none else than the Mother of the Universe. He told him that he had acted very unwisely in creating enmity with Shri Rama, the Lord of Raghus, whom Lord Shiva and Brahma, the Creator worship. He further added that he was prepared to go to the battle field to have a glimpse of Shri Rama with which his eyes would be blessed, doomed as he was, if he did not return it should be assumed that he had been killed by His mighty arms. Ravana obliged him with a lot of food and liquor which he devoured before leaving for the battle front all alone.

Shri Rama kills Kumbhakarna

As Vibhishana saw Kumbhakarna coming to the battle front, he went forth to him. Kumbhakarna lifted him (being his younger brother) and clasped him. In the heart of his hearts he was happy that Vibhishana was a devotee of Shri Rama. Vibhishana told him of the circumstances that led him to take refuge at the feet of Shri Rama. Kumbhakarna was happy with him and told him that Ravana was in the clutches of death and that is why he did not listen to the sane advice. After advising Vibhishana to return to Shri Rama, the giant Kumbhakarna moved ahead like a mountain roaring

loudly and crushing monkeys and bears under his massive feet. Inspite of rocks, trees, stones thrown at him, he proceeded ahead undaunted. He fought with Hanuman, Nala, Nila and Angada one by one and threw them on the ground with his mighty blows. Sugriva too was pressed by him under his arms. Sigriva released himself as he bit his ears and nose, but was again dashed to the ground by the powerful monster. They all fled and took Shri Rama's refuge. The monkeys also ran helter and skelter. Shri Rama told them to raise the morale of their forces and Himself set out to fight Kumbhakarna. Shri Rama disintegrated with His arrows the huge rocks that were thrown by Kumbhakarna. Then with the discharge by Shri Rama of a hundred thousand arrows which came like winged snakes, many demons were killed. With more shafts from His bow, He cut off Kumbhakarna's arms, Kumbhakarna made a fearful run towards Shri Rama and let out a terrible yell. The Gods in Heaven were disturbed. perceiving their discomfiture, Shri Rama blocked the wide open mouth of Kumbhakarna with His arrows, and then cut off his head from his body with another sharp arrow that turned into a sharp lethal discus. Kumbhakarna's head dropped in front of the ten-headed demon King, Ravana. Then Shri Rama cut off his body. The Gods in Heaven sounded their kettledrums with the death of Kumbhakarna who having died at the hands of Shri Rama went straight to Shri Rama's abode. Narada appeared on the scene and sang in glory of Shri Rama biding Him to do away with Ravana soon.

Meghanada overpowers Shri Rama

A spell of gloom fell on Ravana and all the ladies in the demon kingdom of Lanka. They all mourned the death of Kumbhakarna and countless demons. This enraged Meghanada, the eldest son of Ravana, who went to the battle field in a charmed chariot and used his illusive power in the fight. He created a havoc with his various types of weapons like lances, pikes, swords, axes, bludgeons, stones, etc. He disappeared and reappeared frequently and many a times created a loud roar from the air that sent the monkey forces in a disarray. He assailed on Hanuman, Angada, Nala, Nila, Sugriva, Vibhishana and even Laxmana with his arrows. He confronted Shri Rama and over-powered Him with his Nagpash (an arrow that transformed into a coil of serpents). Though Shri Rama could have overpowered it, yet behaving like a normal human being, a mortal, He fell down unconscious. Seeing that Shri Rama had fallen, Meghanada raised a loud cry of jubilation. Jambavan shouted at him in anger and charged at him. Meghanada threw a trident on Jambavan which he caught with his hand and threw it back hitting Meghanada who fell down on the ground. Jambavan raised him by his foot and hurled him into Lanka. Narada, seeing Shri Rama unconscious despatched Hanuman to request Garuda to rescue Him. Garuda readily agreed and devoured the whole swarm of snakes entangling Shri Rama's body. Shri Rama's consciousness was restored and He stood up. Everyone around Him and the Gods in Heaven rejoiced.

Laxmana kills Meghanada

Meghanada felt disturbed that inspite of inflicting lethal injury on Laxmana as well as Shri Rama and completely overpowering them, he failed to kill them. He, therefore, decided to carry out a sacrifice to earn a boon of becoming invincible. He went to a remote undisclosed cave and began the sacrifice. Vibhishana learnt about it and reported it to Shri Rama advising Him not to allow the sacrifice to be completed. Shri Rama despatched Angada, Nila, Mainda and Hanuman with Laxmana and other forces and told them to wreck the sacrifice and kill Meghanada in the battle. He also advised Jambavan, Sugriva and Vibhishana to keep by the side of Laxmana.

As they arrived near the cave, they found Meghanada making oblations of blood and buffaloes in the sacrifice. They wrecked the sacrifice but Meghanada could not be disturbed from continuing with the sacrifice. They pulled him by the hair. This enraged Meghanada and he started abusing Laxmana and came running with a trident so as to hurt Laxmana. As Hanuman and Angada saw this, they stepped forth but Meghanada laid them on the ground with a stroke of his trident. When he threw the trident at Laxmana, he caught and broke it into two. Hanuman and Angada recovering from their fall intervened again and hit Meghanada but to no effect. Laxmana discharged arrows on Meghanada but he disappeared with his illusive powers. He played hide and seek and arrows began to fly across and Laxmana could not overpower him for quite sometime. Ultimately Laxmana discharged an arrow with a smart aim, muttering Shri Rama's name and this time the

arrow struck straight on his chest. Meghanada lost all his illusive powers and fell dead on the ground. hanuman lifted his dead body and hurled it with such a force that it dropped at the Gate of Lanka. Hanuman and Angada praised Laxmana saying that his mother was, indeed, a blessed woman to have given birth to such a brilliant warrior. They went to Shri Rama, who was extremely happy at the success of Laxmana and embraced him.

In Lanka there was lamentation. Mandhodari, in particular, was greatly hurt with the death of his eldest son. People abused Ravana for the doom to which he was putting his family and entire demon population of Lanka. Ravana, on his part, tried to console his wife and other ladies.

Ravana leads the attack for the first time

The next morning Ravana himself went to the battle front with his warriors. Though he told them that those who did not want to go to fight could as well stay back but noone dared to do so. A number of bad omens occurred when he left for the battle. Weapons fell from his hands, warriors fell in their cars, horses and elephants shrieked, jackals and vultures gave shrill calls, dogs and donkeys let out peculiar cries. Even owls created alarming notes. But how could the ego in Ravana make him consider these bad omens? He ordered the warriors to crush the enemy and assured them that he would himself deal with the two Princes.

Vibhishana saw Ravana coming on his chariot. This alarmed him as Shri Rama had none and was bare-footed. He told Shri Rama, "How can You fight Ravana

when You are without a chariot and have no weapons whereas Ravana riding in his chariot is fully equipped with armaments ?" Shri Rama consoled Vibhishana saying, "The wheels of My chariot are My valour and fortitude; its banner is My truthfulness and good conduct; its horses are My strength, discreton, self control and benevolence; Its reins are My forgiveness, compassion and eveness of mind; the driver of My chariot is the adoration of God; dispassion is the shield; contentment, the sword; charity, the axe; reason, the lance; wisdom, the bow; pure steady mind, the quiver; abstinence and religious observances, the sheaf of arrows; and homage to My preceptor is the impenetrable coat. These are the requisites for attaining victory in the battle. " Vibhishana was moved on hearing this and knelt at Shri Rama's feet.

Gods were watching from the Heaven, the greatest fight about to take place between Shri Rama and Ravana. Lord Shiva told Parvati that He Himself watched the battle from His abode. A fierce fight ensued between monkeys and demons. Monkeys threw stones and trees on the demons, tortured them, cut their throats and abdomens and ate their flesh. Seeing the miserable condition of his warriors, Ravana picked ten bows in his twenty hands and discharged arrows on monkeys. The monkeys were distressed to see many of them being mauled by Ravana's arrows. They prayed for help from Shri Rama. Laxmana came forth to face Ravana. A fierce fight took place. Laxmana succeeded in destroying Ravana's chariot and charioteer. More arrows from Laxmana put Ravana senseless on the ground. He stood again and hurled the lance that was given to him by Brahma. The lance hit Laxmana and he fell down. Ravana tried to lift him but

could not, he being none else than Shesha, who supports the Universe on his head. Hanuman engaged Ravana in a fight of fist blows. At first Hanuman fell down but then he toppled Ravana down on the ground. Laxmana was carried to Shri Rama by Hanuman and there he rose as he was addressed as the Savior of Gods and Devourer of Death by his elder brother. He again returned to fight. Ravana was thrown on the ground with his arrows. Laxmana also damaged his chariot competely and killed the charioteer. Another charioteer came to his rescur and took him back to Lanka.

Back in his Palace, Ravana started offering a sacrifice to become invincible. Vibhishana got the news and informed Shri Rama about it. He despatched Hanuman and Angada with lots of monkeys and they forced Ravana to leave the sacrifice halfway as they not only kicked him from all sides but also dragged his wives. Thus, succeeding in their mission Hanuman and others returned to Shri Rama.

Shri Rama kills Ravana

Next day Ravana again left for the battle field amidst bad omens. Gods prayed for an immediate death of Ravana at whose hands They had suffered a lot. They prayed to Shri Rama to play no more with Ravana as Sita was very much disconsolate. Shri Rama heard Their prayers and smiled within Himself. He set out with His 'Sharinga' bow and His quiver containing arrows. Seeing Him on foot, Lord of Heaven, Indra sent His own chariot with Matali as charioteer. Shri Rama mounted

this chariot driven by high spirited and charming horses. Ravana, on the other hand, decided to play his illusive powers, realizing that most of his demon forces had already been wiped out and were being outnumbered by monkeys and bears in the field.

Seeing Shri Rama on the chariot, Ravana used his illusive power, which made monkeys and others except Shri Rama Himself, see numerous Ramas and Laxmanas. This terrified the monkeys and others. Shri Rama sensed it and dispersed the delusion by His arrow. Then He went forth and confronted Ravana. Ravana warned Him that he would kill Him and avenge the death of those whom He had killed. Shri Rama told Ravana to stop bragging. He told him that there are three types of people, those who talk, those who talk and act and those who act and do not talk. Ravana paid a deaf ear to this and discharged arrows of various kinds but these were all consumed by Shri Rama's darts. Ravana hurled a lance but Shri Rama sent it back with His arrow. Even a cloud of discs and tridents were neutralized by Shri Rama's darts. As Shri Rama discharged arrows, even the twang of His bow would create a terror in demon soldiers. With His arrows He killed Ravana's charioteer, the horses, tore his flag and smashed down the chariot. He struck Ravana's brows with ten arrows and blood began to gush out of him. With thirty arrows He cut off his ten heads and twenty arms. But these reappeared immediately on his body after being severed. Shri Rama repeatedly cut off his heads and arms but these reappeared again and again. Ravana discharged a shower of arrows which screened Shri Rama's chariot and rendered it invisible for sometime. This perturbed Gods in Heaven and They cried in alarm. However,

Shri Rama broke this screen with His arrows. He again cut off Ravana's heads with His arrows. The whole sky was full of severed heads. This created terror in monkeys. Ravana hurled a lance towards Vibhishana. Shri Rama received it on His chest, pushing Vibhishana behind Himself. Shri Rama fainted for a while. This infuriated Vibhishana who ran with a club to beat his brother. Vibhishana struck Ravana on the chest toppling him down on the ground with blood spouting from his mouths. Vibhishana and Ravana got engaged in a close fight, the former getting courage by the grace of Shri Rama. Hanuman came to his rescue and damaged Ravana's chariot. Hanuman engaged Ravana in a fight on the ground and in air. When monkeys came to Hanuman's rescue, Ravana dissappeared in the sky by his illusive powers. Shri Rama again wiped out this illusion. When he reapeared, angada and Jambavan challenged Ravana and they fought with him one after the other but they also could not kill him. Jambavan gave a kick on Ravana's chest and he fell unconscious. The charioteer carried him safely to his Palace.

In the Ashoka garden, Trijata who was most favourably inclined towards Sita comforted Her and kept Her informed about the latest news from the battle front. While Her agony of separation was increasing with the passing of each day, Trijata kept assuring Her that Ravana's end was imminent and drawing nearer.

Having recovered from the unconscious state, Ravana abused the charioteer for having removed him from the battle front and left again to fight along with the other demons. Ravana again used his illusive powers

and monkeys saw lots of ferocious creatures, fire and many Hanumans which unnerved them. Shri Rama again made use of His arrow to dispel the illusion. In the fierce battle that followed Shri Rama's arrows repeatedly severed Ravana's heads but each time these reappeared. Then Vibhishana went close to Shri Rama and told Him that Ravana had nectar in his naval and so long as his naval was safe, he would not perish. Shri Rama, therefore, took an aim at his naval. At that moment donkeys and dogs howled and birds screamed. Shri Rama discharged thirty one shafts to simultaneously pierce Ravana's naval, ten heads and twenty arms. With the nectar sucked, the headless and armless figure of Ravana fell down on the ground, saying where Shri Rama was so that he would kill Him. With another shaft Shri Rama split Ravana's body into two and he was completely dead. There was jubilation in the Heaven and the Earth and songs were sung in praise of Shri Rama.

Mandhodari wept bitterly as one of the severed heads fell at her feet. She and the other wives of Ravana went weeping to the place where he was lying dead. They shrieked beating their breasts, recounting his glory and admitting that it was only his animosity for Shri Rama that brought unfortunate end to his life, when none of his family members was left even to observe his last rites. Shri Rama asked Vibhishana, who was also weeping over his brother's death, to perform the last rites. After this was done, Shri Rama told Laxmana, Sugriva and others to accompany Vibhishana and install him as the King of Lanka, as He Himself could not go into a city in deference to His father's will. Vibhishana was, thus, installed as the King of Lanka amidst jubilation.

Sita restored to Shri Rama

Shri Rama called Hanuman and asked him to go to Sita, inform Her of Ravana's death and enquire about Her welfare.

Hanuman went to Sita and paid his obeisance. He informed Sita of Ravana's death and the coronation of Vibhishana. She was happy and told Hanuman to do something so that She may see Her Lord with Her own eyes. Hanuman promptly reported this to Shri Rama who asked Vibhishana and Angada to accompany Hanuman and respectfully escort Sita. They went and Vibhishana ordered the demonesses to give a wash to Sita and adorn Her with new dresses and ornaments. They brought Her in a beautiful palanquin. As they came near Shri Rama He told them to let Her walk on foot so that monkeys, bears and all others could see Her and be blessed.

Agni Pariksha

As Sita came near Shri Rama, He spoke some reproachful words, hearing which made the demonesses accompanying Her to lament. Sita asked Laxmana to play the role of a priest and kindle a fire. Laxmana was puzzled and alarmed but seeing Shri Rama's approval, he kindled the fire. Sita entered the fire and said, I never set My heart on anyone other than My Lord Shri Rama, in thought, word and deed. The fire should become as cool as sandal paste for Me." Her shadow form and social stigma due to Her forced stay in Lanka were consumed by the God of Fire who assumed a human form and

handed over Sita to Shri Rama. Gods in Heaven, showered flowers on Sita. The monkeys, bears and others present were delighted to see Sita by the side of Shri Rama ending Their long sorrowful separation. They all sang hymns glorifying Shri Rama. Shri Rama thanked Matali and instructed him to take the chariot back to Lord Indra.

<u>Gods admire Shri Rama</u>

Gods addressed Shri Rama as the friend of the meek and equal to the Imperishable Selfborn Brahma, who had taken the form of fish (Matsya), tortoise (Kachap), boar (Varaha), dwarf (Vamana) and Parshurama. They told Him that He had appeared in one form or the other whenever Gods were in trouble at the hands of impious, greedy and lust- and vanity-ridden wretches. Shri Rama thanked Them saying that His success was due to Their goodwill. The Gods accompanied by Brahma sang songs in praise of Shri Rama hearing which His body was thrilled with emotion.

At that moment King Dashratha appeared in the sky in his celestial form. Shri Rama, Laxmana and Sita made obeisance to him. Shri Rama told His father that it was due to his blessings that He was able to kill Ravana. Dashratha had not attained final beatitude as He bore the same affection for Shri Rama as before. So Shri Rama bestowed wisdom on His father and he joyfully returned to his abode in the Heaven.

Then Lord Indra appeared and glorified Shri Rama and wished to be blessed with constant devotion. Indra asked Shri Rama if He could do anything for Him.

Shri Rama asked Him to restore to life all monkeys and bears who had sacrificed their lives while fighting on His behalf. Though Shri Rama could do it Himself yet He gave this honour to Indra. Indra at once restored to life all the monkeys and bears who had died except the demons.

Lord Shiva also appeared and sang in praise of Shri Rama and told Him that He would meet Him again when His coronation would be performed at Ayodhya.

Vibhishana thanked Shri Rama for having done so much for him and requested Him to bless his house by His presence and thereafter allow him to join Him on His return journey to Ayodhya. Shri Rama consoled Vibhishana and told him that Bharata, who was leading a life of a hermit constantly muttering His name, must be waiting anxiously. He further said that for HIm each moment without Bharata appeared an age. He blessed Vibhishana saying, "You will enjoy sovereignty till the end of creation. You must always keep Me in your heart and then in the end You shall ascend to My abode which is the final destination of holy men."

Vibhishana went and got his aerial car 'Pushpaka' (which Ravana had taken away from Kuber), filled it with precious stones and articles like dresses, etc. for Shri Rama. On seeing all these precious gifts He told Vibhishana to step into the car, go high up and scramble the precious stones and dresses. He did accordingly and the monkeys and bears picked up whatever they could. He told the monkeys and bears that it was due to their might that He succeeded in killing Ravana and others.

He blessed them advising them to keep their thoughts fixed on Himself. They dispersed after bowing to Shri Rama.

Shri Rama returns to Ayodhya

Shri Rama sat in the Pushpaka along with Sita. Laxmana stood behind them. He then asked Vibhishana, Sugriva, Nala, Nila, Jambavan, Angada and Hanuman to join Him. The aerial car set into motion and flew northwards. En route Shri Rama showed Sita the places where Laxmana killed Meghanada, Hanuman and Angada killed mighty warriors and where the mighty Kumbhakarna and Ravana fell. He also showed Her the bridge they constructed across the Ocean and Rameshwaram where He installed a Linga and worshipped Lord Shiva.

They halted at Dhandaka forest where Shri Rama visited the hermitages of Sage Agastya and at Chitrakoot where they met Sages. He then showed Sita the Prayaga, where the holy Yamuna meets the Celestial Ganga and the Subterranean Saraswati. They could see Ayodhya at a distance and made obeisance to this holy city. They halted at Triveni and took a bath there. At this place Shri Rama told Hanuman to go to Ayodhya in the guise of a religious student and convey their welfare to Bharata and return at once. While Hanuman went to meet Bharata, Shri Rama paid a visit to Sage Bhardwaja. Thereafter the Pushpaka flew across the Ganges and it landed at Sringaverapura. Nishadaraja prostrated before Shri Rama and Sita. Shri Rama clasped him.

Sita offered thanks-giving prayers to the Mother Ganges and received Her blessings.

End of Lanka Kanda

Sant Tulsidas closes this 'Kanda' with the advice that those who listen to or read the story of Shri Rama's victory over Ravana, get the reward of everlasting victory, wisdom and prosperity.

*** End of Descent VI ***

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SHRI RAMACHARITAMANASA (THE MANASAROVAR OF MIND CLEANSING DEEDS AND EXPLOITS OF SHRI RAMA)

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DESCENT - 7

(UTTAR KANDA)

"Rajeev lochan stravat jal tan lalit pulkavali bani,
Ati prem hridayan lagai anujahi milay Prabhu Tribhuvan dhani!
Prabhu milat anujahi soba mo pahi jati nahin upma kahi,
Janu prem aru singar tanu dhari melay bar sushma lahi!"

..... (Shri Ramacharitamanasa, Descent - VI/5-1)

(His lotus eyes streamed with tears, while bristling hair served to adorn His comely person as Lord Shri Rama, the sovereign of the three spheres, clasped Bharata to His bosom with utmost affection. I find no parallel by which I may illustrate the beauty of the Lord's meeting with His younger brother, it seemed as though the erotic sentiment and affection had met together in exquisite bodily form.)

Shri Rama's reception at Ayodhya

In Ayodhya people were getting restless because only one day was left for the scheduled arrival of Shri Rama yet they had no news about Him at all. Bharata experienced some good omens by way of his right eye and right arm twitching. While he was muttering "Shri Rama! Shri Rama!" Hanuman appeared

before him in the form of a Brahmin. Hearing him mutter, Hanuman told him that Shri Rama was coming along with Sita and Laxmana and that they were all hale and hearty. Seeing the Brahmin giving him information about Shri Rama's welfare, Bharata was highly pleased and enquired who he was. Hanuman disclosed his identity and gave further information about them and returned to Shri Rama.

Bharata, overjoyed and thrilled at the good news Hanuman had given, ran to Sage Vasishtha and the mothers and informed them about it. The entire city of Ayodhya was conveyed this good news. Vamdev, Vasishtha, the mothers and Shatrughna joined Bharata to receive Shri Rama. Ladies of Ayodhya went on rooftops to see them arriving. All streets and houses were decorated to accord them a grand reception.

As Shri Rama saw a huge crowd coming to greet Him, He lowered the aerial car and stepped out to meet His people. He directed the Pushpaka to return to Kubera from whom Ravana had seized it. He met His people and blessed them. Then He and Laxmana bowed to Sage Vasishtha and received his blessings. Bharata prostrated before Shri Rama who lifted him and clasped him hard. He also clasped Shatrughna. Laxmana embraced Bharata and Shatrughna very warmly. Bharata and Shatrughna bowed at the feet of Sita. The people of Ayodhya were extremely happy to see Shri Rama return and embrace Bharata and Shatrughna. They came forth to embrace Him. When Shri Rama sensed that everyone wanted to meet Him individually to personally express his emotions, He by His power created as many Ramas as there were people and each one of them had the pleasure of receiving Shri Rama individually in the it

appealed to them. Some embraced Him, some touched His feet, some blessed Him, some kissed Him, etc. None could understand the illusion created by Him.

The mothers received Shri Rama, Laxmana and Sita with great affection. Kaikeyi was still feeling uncomfortable at heart. Sumitra praised Laxmana for the service he rendered to Shri Rama and Sita. Kaushalya looking at Shri Rama's limbs told Him that she wondered how He was able to kill the mighty Ravana with His delicate arms.

Sugriva, Vibhishana, Nala, Nila, Jambavan, Angada and Hanuman took human form and were overwhelmed to see how warmly Shri Rama, Laxmana and Sita were received by Bharata, Shatrughna, Sage Vasishtha, the mothers and the people of Ayodhya. Shri Rama told them to make obeisance to Sage Vasishtha, due to whose blessings He could defeat Ravana. They bowed to the Sage. Shri Rama introduced them to the Sage, His brothers and mothers and related how they helped Him in killing the demons including their King and rescuing Sita from his clutches.

Sensing that Kaikeyi was still feeling guilty for having planned to send them to the forests for fourteen years, Shri Rama first went to her to comfort and console her in order to enable her to forget the past, regain her confidence and remain happy. He retired to His own apartment only after ensuring that all arrangements were made for the comfort of His guests.

At the instance of Sage Vasishtha, Sumantra made all the arrangements for Shri Rama's coronation on an auspicious day.

Ayodhya was once again decorated for the coronation ceremony. Shri Rama called His servants and told them to arrange for the bath of the guests. He called Bharata and Himself unlocked his hair, combed and dressed it. Then He got His three brothers bathed. After seeking His preceptor's permission, He also had a bath. The mothers bathed Sita and dressed Her beautifully. She sat on the left side of Shri Rama on an exquisitely adorned throne with Bharata, Laxmana, Shatrughna, Vibhishana, Sugriva and Hanuman and others holding the royal umbrella, fan, bow, sword, shield and the spear respectively. Shri Rama and Sita looked graceful and shone like the Sun and the Moon. Gods came from Heaven to see Them. Brahma and Lord Shiva also came incognito (in the form of ordinary Brahmins) and only Shri Rama could perceive Them. They made their supplication to Shri Rama, singing in His praise. A mark (tilak) was put on Shri Rama's forehead by Sage Vasishtha and thereafter all Brahmins applied the mark on their foreheads. They all sang in praise of Shri Rama. Amidst chanting of Vedas, supplication made by Gods and hymns sung by Brahmins, Shri Rama was crowned to the joy of everyone in Ayodhya and in Heaven. When the ceremony was over the Gods blessed Shri Rama and Sita and returned to their abodes.

Shri Rama's guests were so much engrossed in the festivities and pleasure of His company that they did not feel as if six months had elapsed. They had forgotten their home. Shri Rama called them and with lot of love and affection gently told them to return to their homes. He assured them that He loved them more than His brothers but they must return home and keep

remembering Him while at home. They were given new clothes which Bharata helped them to wear. Angada did not move and kept on looking at Shri Rama and then fell at His feet and said, "My father, Vali, had at the time of his death entrusted me to Your care. I want to stay and serve You for ever." Shri Rama clasped him, gave him a lot of love and bade him farewell along with others. Bharata and Shatrughna accompanied them till they reached their homes and then returned to Ayodhya. Hanuman bowed to Sugriva telling him that he would stay on with Shri Rama for some more time and shall return thereafter. Shri Rama also asked Nishadaraja to return home. He presented him dresses etc. and invited him to revisit Ayodhya more often.

<u>Rama Rajya</u>

Shri Rama began to rule after His coronation. During His rule 'Rama Rajya' the people of Ayodhya enjoyed the following privileges :

* They were immensely happy and prosperous.
* Their sorrows and fears had disappeared.
* Their enmity and disharmony had disappeared.
* They observed Dharma, the path dictated by Vedas.
* They were rid of all diseases.
* Their mutual love and regard increased.

* They were rid of all sins.
* They attained devotion to Shri Rama i.e. Rama Bhakti.
* There was no premature death nor any suffering.
* They had good health and pleasing appearance.
* No one was destitute, afflicted or miserable.
* Their virtues and wisdom had increased.
* Their zeal for learning had increased.
* They acknowledged the services and benefits received from others.
* Their happiness, prosperity and generosity had increased.
* Husbands were monogamous and wives were devoted to husbands in thought, word and deed.
* Punishment of any sort was abolished.
* Forests blossomed and trees bore fruit throughout the year.
* Birds and beasts forgot their enmity and loved each other.
* Cows yielded milk to ones heart's content and bees gave honey in abundance.
* Rainfall was adequate and so was the growth of trees, plants, food stuffs and vegetables.

* Rivers and streams ran full and clear, tanks and reservoirs were adequately filled and the oceans brought jewels on the shores.
* Sunshine was adequate (as much as necessary) and Moon gave sufficient light.
* Lots of sacrifices were performed and lots of gifts would be given to Brahmins.
* The gardens attached to the houses were full of flowers.
* All streets and crossings were kept clean and nicely decorated.
* Children reared birds who would sing beautiful notes. They taught parrots to repeat Raghupati Rama.
* All markets wore a splendid look and everyone had one's requirement fulfilled without any consideration.
* Saryu River bore clean water and was provided with many 'ghats' for men, women and animals. Tulsi plants were provided on its banks in clusters.
* The entire city looked beautiful, peaceful and prosperous and everywhere people sang the praises of Shri Rama.

Sita, Herself was devoted to Shri Rama and did all household work Herself inspite of many maid servants available at Her disposal in the Palace. She served all Her mothers with equal attention. The younger brothers

served Shri Rama and waited on Him to receive orders. Sita gave birth to pretty sons Lava and Kusha. Both the boys were well versed in warfare, modest, accomplished and handsome. Shri Rama's other brothers too were blessed with two sons each who were all pretty, virtuous and full of merit.

Shri Rama meets Sages Sanaka and others

Shri Rama and others would regularly bathe in Saryu and then sit in an assembly of Brahmins and holy men where Sage Vasishtha expounded the Vedas and Puranas. Sages like Narada, Sanaka and others also came to Ayodhya to have a sight of Shri Rama.

One day Shri Rama went to the forests along with His brothers and favourite Hanuman. Finding a good opportunity, Sage Sanaka and his three brothers Sanandana, Sanatana and Sanatkumara (They are believed to be the first progeny of Brahma during the present creation. They are perpetual celibates and are still living in the abode of Brahma. Their present age is being computed at about 1950 million years) came. Sanaka and his brothers had stayed in the hermitage of Sage Agastya where they heard the story of Shri Rama. Thereafter, they made it a point to attend all the holy congregations where the recital of Shri Rama's exploits would be taking place. Shri Rama, on seeing the four Sages, prostrated before them. He made them sit on His own yellow scarf. Bharata, Laxmana, Shatrughna and Hanuman also prostrated before them. While the four Sages gazed at Shri Rama with unwinking eyes, their eyes streamed with tears. Shri Rama expressed His gratitude to them for blessing them with their visit. He

told them it is fortunate for one to secure the company of saints. It is only through such communion that the chain of births and deaths is broken. The four brothers were delighted and sang Shri Rama's praises and prayed for granting them His unceasing love and devotion. Thereafter they departed for the 'Brahmalok'.

Qualities of Saints and the wicked

Bharata wanted to talk to Shri Rama, after Sanaka and his brothers left, but could not gather courage to do so. Hanuman, sensing Bharata's plight, drew Shri Rama's attention towards Bharata saying that he wished to ask something. Bharata, clasping Shri Rama's feet, asked, "What are the distinctive features of saints and what are their distinguishing traits?" Shri Rama said in reply to Bharata's enquiry, "The saints and the wicked are analogous to sandalwood and axe respectively. The qualities of saints are:

* They do not interfere or get involved in other's deeds.

* They are gentle, virtuous and tender at heart.

* They get hurt on seeing others in pain or distress and rejoice on seeing others joyful.

* They are devoid of ego and have no fear or anger.

* They have no enmity with anyone.

* They cherish devotion to Me.
* Their thoughts are pure and mind calm.
* They are modest and respect others.
* They are always happy and good to everyone.

The qualities of the wicked are :

* Their company gives more pain than satisfaction.
* They are happy on those who praise them and always talk ill of others.
* They get unhappy if others are richer than them.
* They are afflicted with greed, arrogance, vanity and anger.
* They are deceitful, merciless and impure.
* They have enmity with all without reason.
* They are unfair and cunning in their dealings.
* They enjoy others wives, others wealth and take pleasure in slandering others.
* They have no fear of death and punishment at the hands of the God of Death.
* They are disrespectful towards their parents and Guru and are never happy in the company of saints.
* They are in very small number in 'Dwapara Yuga' but in 'Kali Yuga' they are in plenty. They do not exist in 'Satya or Treta Yuga'."

Shri Rama further said, "Vedas and other Puranas provide that those who inflict pain on others even after attaining human body have to suffer the terrible pangs of death and birth. They are punished for their bad deeds."

Shri Rama's advice to make the best use of human existence

One day Shri Rama invited Sage Vasishtha, leading Brahmins and other citizens to the assembly hall. He asked them to listen to His words which He would speak not out of attachment for them, or out of His authority but so as to advise them and leave it to their choice to act on it. He said, "It is your good fortune to have secured a human form. This form though difficult to attain, is the most suitable for spiritual endeavours which can lead one to liberation. One who fails to earn a good destiny even after attaining this form reaps torture in the other world, where he may attribute it to time, fate and God. Sensuous enjoyment or even heavenly enjoyment are short lived. The immortal soul goes through a cycle of eighty four lakh species of life and rarely does God bestow human form. This is the best form when one can cross the ocean of mundane existence with My favour and the guidance of a preceptor amongst you. One who is unable to do so is dull-witted, ungrateful and as bad as a self-murderer. If one seeks happiness in the present life and thereafter, one should have devotion to Me. Devotion is indispensable and a mine of blessing that can be attained through fellowship with saints.

Devotion to Me cannot be attained unless one is devoted to Lord Shiva. You need to practice neither yoga, nor japa, nor sacrifices, nor penance, nor fasting, but have a guileless disposition, a mind free from perversity. Absolute contentment is all that you need. One who has no enmity with anyone and is devoid of hope and fear is always joyful. One who is fond of singing and hearing My praise, devoted to My name and free of all attachment, arrogance and infatuation is loved by Me and blessed."

After hearing Shri Rama's advice, those present there were happy and they clasped His feet. They dispersed after receiving His permission.

One day Sage Vasishtha called on Shri Rama and told Him how at first he was reluctant to accept the family priesthood job, (when it was offered by Brahma, his Father) on the plea that this vocation was considered low. On Brahma's assurance that he would be benefited by the sight of the Supreme Spirit who would appear in the Raghu's race and thinking that it could be a good opportunity, he had accepted the vocation and thus, was able to have Shri Rama's sight. He said that one who is devoted to His feet is all wise, the knower of Truth, learned and an abode of virtue. Sage Vasishtha sought a boon of securing love for His feet from one life to another. After being granted the boon, the Sage returned.

Once Shri Rama went to a mango grove with his brothers. They sat on a scarf laid by Bharata and Hanuman started to fan Shri Rama. Shri Rama was delighted and His eyes were filled with tears. Lord Shiva told Girija that there is none so blessed by or so devoted to Shri Rama as Hanuman. Shri Rama has Himself extolled Hanuman's love and service to Him.

Story of Bhushandi and Garuda

Lord Shiva, thus, narrated the story of Shri Rama to His spouse Uma who listened to it patiently and with rapt attention. He said that He had narrated Her the story as He knew it and as Kak Bhushandi had related the same to Garuda, the King of birds. He told Her that the exploits of Shri Rama and His names and birth were numerous and it would be difficult to recount all these. Uma expressed Her gratitude to Lord Shiva for relating to Her a detailed account of Shri Rama's exploits and hearing from Him words in praise of Shri Rama which removes the fear of birth and death from one's mind. She felt as if She had attained the object of Her life and had no delusions left in Her. She then asked Lord Shiva to explain Her how Bhushandi, a crow, attained deep devotion to Shri Rama, how he got the form of a crow inspite of such devotion, wherefrom he learnt this story of Shri Hari and why Garuda, himself so much enlightened and being the King of birds, went to Bhushandi to hear the story.

So Lord Shiva started telling Uma the story of Bhushandi as under :

Uma, in Her previous life, was born to Daksha as his daughter Sati. She got insulted by Her father at a sacrifice performed by him by way of not having invited Her and Her spouse Shiva. Feeling insulted, Sati gave up her life. Thereafter, Shiva's men destroyed the sacrifice and Himself felt bad after this incident. He wandered about aimlessly in the mountains and valleys and found four charming mountain peaks. On one of the peaks stood a banyan tree, a peepul, a plaksha (fig tree), a mango tree and a beautiful lake containing cool and clear water and having lotuses and swans in it. Bhushandi dwells there. He performs japa under the Plaksha, offers mental prayers under the mango tree, and under the banyan tree he narrates the episodes of the story of Shri Rama to the birds who flock there. Shiva was enchanted by the scene and assumed the form of a swan, stayed there till He heard the entire story and thereafter, returned to Kailash. Bhushandi has outlived even the end of the world.

Garuda had been sent by Narada, when Shri Rama allowed Himself to be bound by 'Nagpash' hurled at Him by Meghanada, the son of Ravana. Garuda consumed all the snakes and freed Shri Rama. Garuda wondered why Shri Rama submitted meekly and could not show His strength and glory and allowed Himself to get tied up by a puny demon with coils of snakes. Garuda went with this doubt to Narada and asked him to explain why Shri Rama could not Himself get rid of the Nagpash. Narada told him that Brahma would be able to remove his doubt. Having gone to Brahma, he was told that only Shiva was conversant with Shri Rama's glory and He alone would be able to give him a satisfactory reply. Then Garuda went to Lord Shiva. At that time Lord Shiva was

on His way to Kubera's residence and Uma was alone at Kailash. Having met Shiva on the way, he was told that since He was in a hurry it would not be possible for Him to describe Shri Rama's greatness in a short time and remove his delusion regarding the glory of Shri Rama. He said that his doubt, in fact, would get removed by prolonged company with Sages at a place where the story of Shri Rama is recited. He suggested to him to meet Bhushandi, who continuously narrates the episodes of the story of Shri Rama and with this his delusion would disappear. As advised by Lord Shiva, Garuda departed to where Bhushandi stayed.

Lord Shiva told Uma that after disentangling Shri Rama from snakes, Garuda felt proud and doubted the greatness of Shri Rama. He further added that Shri Rama never allows His devotee to go astray. At His instance Lord Shiva sent Garuda to Bhushandi, a bird of lower rank, to wipe out the feeling of pride in him even though He Himself could remove his doubt. The other reason being that a bird could understand a bird better.

<u>Bhushandi tells Garuda the story of Shri Rama</u>

Bhushandi possessed unceasing devotion to Shri Hari. He bathed in the lake and drank its water and then sat under the banyan tree. A number of birds old and young collected round Bhushandi. Bhushandi was about to commence the narration of Shri Rama's story when Garuda came. Bhushandi received Garuda, the King of birds, with due honour and seated him appropriately close to himself. On enquiring the purpose of his visit, Garuda

said politely that the object of his visit had been accomplished by the mere sight of this hermitage. He told Bhushandi to narrate the most sacred story of Shri Rama which not only uplifts the mind but also removes all suffering.

So Bhushandi recounted all virtues of Shri Rama and narrated His story from His descent to His return to Ayodhya after fourteen years of exile. Garuda's mind was filled with rapture and all his doubts disappeared. He developed devotion to Shri Rama's feet. Bhushandi praised Garuda and said, "You neither had doubt nor infatuation nor delusion. It was only Shri Rama who sent you here. Even Narada (the Celestial Sage), Shiva (Bhava) and Viranchi (Brahma, the Creator) as well as Sanaka and many other Sages have been blinded by infatuation. There is hardly anyone who has not been betrayed by greed, perverted by pride or smitten by the glances of a woman. The desire of progeny, wealth and fame constitute the retinue of `Maya', formidable and infinite in size and number. It is spread over the whole Universe. Anger, greed, hypocrisy, deceit, heresy are its forms. `Maya' gets dispelled by devotion to Shri Rama who is the totality of Existence, Knowledge, Bliss, Wisdom, Beauty, Strength and devoid of births. He took the form of an earthly sovereign and performed the most sacred deeds in the manner of an ordinary mortal, just as an actor assumes various guises and exhibits various characters on the stage but himself remains the same. It is only the sinful steeped in lust, anger, arrogance and greed who do not understand Him and His work like a jaundiced person to whom everything looks pale."

Then Bhushandi recited the story of how he himself fell prey to the delusion. He said, "I go to the city of Ayodhya whenever Shri Rama appears in human semblance and take delight in beholding His childish exploits and the festival of His birth. I stay there for five years in the form of a crow to remain in company of Shri Hari. I see Him moving about, sitting and eating. Whatever He spews out of His mouth, I quickly jump at it and gobble it up. The child Shri Rama is my deity. He lives along with His brothers in the Palace. They play in the porch, fore ground and in the rooms. I go near them when they play and fly off when the child Shri Rama comes to catch me. Unable to catch me, He smiles at first and weeps later. As He goes in, He looks back at me. One day the child Shri Rama played such a `Maya' with me that none of His brothers could know nor did He tell His parents about it. As I went near Shri Rama while He was crawling, He lifted His hand to catch me. I ran and then flew higher and higher but the hand continued to follow me close. I flew as far as I could go but the hand remained only two fingers short of me. Utterly frightened, I rubbed my eyes and found myself on the branch of a tree in the Palace with the child Shri Rama looking at me and smiling with an open mouth. His mouth being open, I was drawn into it and once inside I saw numerous spheres within Him, each more beautiful than the other. I saw myriads of Brahmas, Shivas, countless stars, Suns, Moons, Yamas, mountains, oceans, lakes, rivers, forests and a great variety of creation. I saw such marvels that I had never seen before. I stayed there to see multitudinous universes, each more beautiful than the other. Each Universe had its own Ayodhya, its own men and women, its own Dashratha, Kaushalya and Shri Rama's

brothers and in each I witnessed the descent of Shri Rama, who had the same form in all these, with the same childish pranks. I felt as if a hundred cycles had been spent by me in wandering and then I went to my hermitage. Upon hearing of Shri Rama's advent I again went to Ayodhya. Seeing all this I felt my wisdom had been obscured by delusion. This led me to distress as I could not understand what this sight was all about." Feeling Bhushandi in distress Shri Rama laughed, opened His mouth again and Bhushandi came out and saw Shri Rama playing again His childish pranks. Visualizing the outside environs and what all he had seen inside Him, he lost consciousness and cried for the Lord to save him from the distress. By His grace he was restored to consciousness and beheld His true form. Seeing the kindness of Shri Rama, Bhushandi's heart was filled with immense joy and he sang in His praise. Shri Rama told him that He was prepared to grant him any boon he desired. Bhushandi asked for only one boon and that was uninterrupted and unalloyed devotion to His feet. Shri Rama granted it saying that his mind shall never get clouded by any errors that may arise from 'Maya'. A devotee is dearest to Shri Rama, be it a man or a woman or the one who is neither. He, therefore, asked Bhushandi to worship Him and abandon all other hope or reliance. Saying this, He again assumed the child form and began to play. When His mother, Kaushalya, came He showed signs of being hungry and she clasped Him and began to breast feed Him. Bhushandi stayed in Ayodhya for some more time and then returned to his hermitage.

Bhushandi told Garuda that without devotion to Shri Hari one's difficulties and sorrows do not get removed; without adoring Shri Rama, one cannot know Him and without faith one cannot develop devotion for Him. He narrated lot many stories of Shri Rama's greatness and Garuda got more and more pleased. Garuda then spread his wings and held Shri Rama in his heart. He admitted that he had considered Shri Rama to be only an ordinary human being but with all that he had learnt from him, his delusion had totally disappeared. He submitted to Bhushandi to accept him as his servant. Then he enquired from Bhushandi as to how he had learnt about this self-purifying lake of Shri Rama's exploits (Ramacharitamanasa) and why he had assumed the form of a crow only.

Telling Uma the story of Shri Rama and His Exploits, Lord Shiva continued the narration to describe what Bhushandi told Garuda in response to the latter's query. Bhushandi said, "The act of muttering of prayers, practising penance, offering sacrifice, taking sacred vows, charity, dispassion, yoga and realization give one the fruit of devotion to the feet of Shri Rama. Without devotion no one can attain lasting peace. It was only in the form of a crow that I was blessed with devotion to Shri Rama and therefore, this form is dearest to me. Although I have been blessed with command on death and reincarnation in the form of my choice, yet I refuse to give up my body as a crow in which I have forever been happy. I have gone through a lot of hardships in my earlier births, which I can easily recollect."

Life in Kaliyuga

Narrating the incidents about his previous births, Bhushandi said, "In the former `Kalpa', the world was passing through Kaliyuga, the hot bed of sins. I was born as a `Shudra' in the city of Ayodhya. I was a staunch devotee of Lord Shiva and would revile other Gods. Overwhelmed with pride and heresy I did not know anything about Shri Rama even while living in Ayodhya. In `Kaliyuga' everything becomes peculiar because,

* No one follows the duties assigned to his caste.
* The four duties of the four stages (ashrams) of one's life are not followed.
* People take pleasure in revolting against Vedas and their injunctions.
* Brahmins supposedly the custodians and preachers of Vedas misuse them.
* Kings are unkind to their citizens to the extent of sucking their blood through excessive exploitation.
* People follow the path that suit their fancy.
* One who talks more is honoured.
* Hypocrites are taken for saints.
* Those who speak lies and are given to joking and laughing every time are considered to be virtuous.

* People who give up the path of Vedas are considered wise.
* Those who grow long hair and long nails, use strange robes, eat anything good or bad are considered as ascetics and are adored.
* The domination of the woman is on the increase and a man dances before her like a monkey.
* Shudras impart spiritual and religious wisdom to the Brahmins.
* Shudras wear the sacred thread and accept the worst types of gifts.
* Men are greedy and hostile to Gods, saints and Vedas.
* Women give up their husbands and take to their paramours.
* Wives who have their husbands alive do not wear ornaments.
* The disciple and preceptor behave like deaf and blind respectively.
* Spiritual guides rob their disciples of money and impart no knowledge.
* Parents teach their children the religion of filling their bellies.
* Men and women kill a Brahmin or even their spiritual guide for money howsoever small.
* 'Shudras' argue with Brahmins about their own superiority.

* Those who show interest in others wives are called clever.

* People of low caste and lower grade of society shave their heads and become sanyasins and are worshipped by Brahmins.

* Brahmins are unlettered and stupid and marry women of lower castes.

* People perpetrate sins and reap suffering, disease and sorrow.

* Sanyasins construct big houses and furnish these lavishly to have easy and comfortable life.

* Men take pleasure to drive out a virtuous and well born wife and instead bring in a servant girl.

* Sons respect their parents till they get married and after marriage they get closer to their in-laws than their own parents.

* Kings forget piety and get sinful.

* Those who refuse to recognize Vedas and Puranas are called true saints.

* Famines are a frequent occurrence.

* Japas and sacrifices are performed for unholy purposes.

* Women have less wisdom and are not gentle at heart. They hanker after riches and comforts. Their greed and appetite is on the increase. They consider their hair a great source of beauty and dress it differently to make it appear fanciful.

* Men are conceited and tormented with disease. Mutual brotherhood disappears.

* Speaking of harsh words and envy is more rampant amongst men.

* Men and women pamper their body.

* Men and women abound in impurities and vices.

He further added, "But inspite of the above mentioned peculiarities, the redeeming feature of `Kaliyuga' is that one gets freed of one's sins and secures final emancipation by taking the name of Shri Hari and singing His virtues. It is not necessary to worship God, perform sacrifices or practice Yoga as is required in `Satya Yuga', `Treta Yuga' or `Dwapara Yuga'."

He said, "The characteristics of all the four Yugas `Sattva' (harmony, stable mind and spirituality) `Rajas' (attachment to action and happiness) and `Tamas' (feeling of mingled joy and fear) are present in everyone all the time. In `Satya Yuga' one abounds in `Sattva', in the `Treta Yuga' one has more of `Sattva and a little of `Rajas', in the `Dwapara Yuga' one has little of `Sattva' and more of `Rajas'. However, in the `Kali Yuga' one has abundance of `Tamas' with a little of `Rajas'."

Bhushandi's liking the form of Crow

Bhushandi narrated to Garuda a brief account of his earlier births in response to a query from Garuda as to how he had got the form of a crow. He said, "I was once born in Ayodhya and lived there for a long time. A famine occurred and I had to migrate to Ujjain. I was penniless and miserable. With a little effort I started earning and began worshipping Lord Shiva. I met an extremely pious Brahmin who constantly worshipped Lord Shiva and had no other occupation. He would not speak any harsh or unkind word about Shri Hari. This Brahmin taught me many `mantras' of Lord Shiva, which I would recite in the temple of the Lord. After sometime I became conceited thinking that i knew everything about Lord Shiva and that He is the only Lord and there is noone else. I would abuse all other Gods and hated Them. Though the pious Brahmin, my Guru, would admonish me yet I became adamant in my hatred for all Gods.

One day the Brahmin Guru called me and told me that I must adore the feet of Shri Hari as even Lord Shiva adores Him. I got fed up with the Guru's repeated advice and decided to teach him a lesson even though he was kind at heart. One day I was praying in the temple and the Guru came. Normally a disciple should stand up when his Guru comes, but I kept on sitting without bothering to stand up and pay him my obeisance. My Guru did not mind but Lord Shiva got very angry and an ethereal voice in the temple resounded reprimanding me of my arrogance and showing disrespect to my Guru which is against tenets of Vedic laws. I was cursed of getting born in sub-human species to suffer torment in ten thousand births. I remained rooted to my seat like a python and

therefore, I was cursed to be born as a snake in my next birth. The Guru prostrated before Lord Shiva and sang in His praise to propitiate Him. The Lord was happy with the Guru and asked him to wish for a boon. The Guru requested the Lord that the curse should soon prove to be blessing for me. The Lord accepted his prayer and reduced the curse to one thousand incarnations and granted a special boon that the agony of each birth shall neither affect me and nor shall I be aware of the previous births and that I would be able to change my form at my own will and shall have access everywhere without any obstruction. The Guru was happy and thanked the Lord.

I was then born as a snake in Vindyachal mountains. Thereafter I appeared in various forms at my own will but never was tormented nor did I lose my understanding and in each form I adored Shri Rama and Lord Shiva. I was born in human form, which one gets rarely, in my last birth. As a boy I would enact the pastimes of Shri Rama. I spent my time in prayers, moving in forests and meeting Sages from whom I would listen to the stories of Shri Rama's virtues. The craving of my heart was to behold Shri Rama. I would not get satisfied when Sages would tell one that God represents the totality of created beings. Going from place to place, I went on singing praises of Shri Rama. I reached Mount Meru where I came across Sage Lomasha. After bowing to the Sage and showing all respect to him, I enquired how I should worship the Supreme Spirit. The Sage Lomasha recounted the virtues of Shri Rama and gave a sermon on Brahaman - the Absolute, the Unborn, the one without a second, the Ruler of heart, Desireless, Incomprehensible, attainable through realization,

Indestructible and Incomparable, and identical with man. This did not appeal to me and I asked the Sage to tell me how to worship the embodied Brahaman. I told him that I felt happy to worship Shri Rama but wanted to behold Him with my own eyes. The Sage did not accept that the Supreme Spirit possessed an embodied form. I entered into an argument with the Sage and he admonished me for not listening to his sermon and said that I argued and looked at everything with distrust like a crow. Saying this Lomasha cursed me that I be born as a crow.

As the Sage cursed me, I got transformed into a crow. I bowed to the Sage and flew off fixing my thoughts on Shri Rama. Those who are free from lust, vanity and anger and look on the world as full of their Lord cannot have any animosity. As such taking the form of a crow did not imbibe in me any bad feeling for the Sage. The Sage came to know that I was a servant of Shri Rama in thought, word and deed. He was amazed at my faith and politely called me back, consoled me and imparted the knowledge of how to meditate on Shri Rama as a child. The Sage made me stay at his hermitage and recited the 'Ramacharitamanasa' - the Manasa lake of Shri Rama's exploits. The Sage told that he had heard the charming lake of Shri Rama's exploits from Lord Shiva and had repeated the same to me seeing my devotion towards Shri Rama. He blessed me that Shri Rama would always reside in my heart and I shall be an embodiment of all good qualities and would be able to change my form at will and choose my own time of death. He also blessed me that ignorance and suffering shall never be near me and the flame of my devotion for Shri Rama

shall grow brighter and brighter. An ethereal voice at that time said, "Let the Sage's prophecy come true." I was overwhelmed with happiness and bowed to the Sage. I came to this hermitage in the mountains and have stayed here for many cycles of creation and whenever the Lord takes birth in Ayodhya I go to have a spectacle of the sport of the child Shri Rama. After keeping His image as a child in my heart, I return to the hermitage to narrate the story of Shri Rama and sing His praises."

Bhushandi, thus, told Garuda his entire story and how he had taken the form of a crow and explained that he liked to stay in that form only as he was able to have a sight of Shri Rama in an embodied form when he had been turned into a crow. Garuda was satisfied and happy with the reply.

Explaining the difference between Gnosis (Gyana) and Devotion (Bhakti), Bhushandi told Garuda that Gnosis is difficult to teach and equally difficult to practice. Devotion is easier and bears fruit sooner. Those who are devoted to Shri Rama are blessed and lust, anger, arrogance and greed never holds sway over them. Shri Rama considers His devotee to be superior to Himself. Replying to Garuda's seven questions, Bhushandi came out with the following thoughts of wisdom :

* Human form is the best form that one can achieve. It is, however, the most difficult to achieve and every creature craves for it. This is the form that takes soul either to hell, heaven or to final beatitude. Those who fail to adore Shri Hari even after getting this form and squander it for the pleasures of senses are the unluckiest and the worst sufferers.

* The worst misery for man is extreme poverty.

* The highest blessing for man is the communion with saints.

* The disposition of saints is beneficence in word, deed and thought. They undergo suffering for others.

* The impious wretches torment others whether they get benefited or not.

* A vow of non-violence is the highest merit known in Vedas and there is no sin as great as talking ill of others.

* Infatuation is the root cause of all ailments and many troubles arise from it e.g. lust, greed, anger, ego, hypocrisy, deceit and arrogance. These are the diseases of mind. For this the only cure is seeking Shri Rama's grace. Men who worship Him are able to cross the most turbulent ocean of mundane existence.

After listening to the entire story of Shri Rama as narrated by Bhushandi, Garuda felt satisfied and overjoyed. His wavering belief and delusion regarding Shri Rama's greatness ended altogether and he held Shri Rama's feet close in his heart. He bowed before Bhushandi again and again. Then he flew off to the divine abode of Lord Vishnu (Vaikuntha).

The entire story of Shri Rama was narrated by Lord Shiva to Parvati, at the latter's request when She showed excessive fondness for the same. In the end

He told Her that there is no gain superior to fellowship with saints which one cannot have without Shri Rama's grace. Those who drink deep into the nectar of His glorifying story are absolved of all sins. Pilgrimages, Yoga, dispassion, wisdom, religious practices, charitable acts, japa, penance, offering sacrifices, compassion to living beings, service to Brahmin and preceptor, nobility of mind and character and all other such activities have the reward of Devotion to Shri Hari. Though difficult to achieve such a devotion, the easiest way to attain it is by listening with faith to this story of Shri Rama. This story should not be narrated to those who are perverse, greedy, lustful and Brahmin haters.

Parvati told Lord Shiva that Her doubts had disappeared and Her devotion to Shri Rama had been renewed.

End of Uttar Kanda

Sant Tulsidas, concludes the Rama-charitamanasa by saying that the holy dialogue between Lord Shiva and Goddess Uma gives immense joy and removes depression. It puts an end to transmigration of soul and culminates in its liberation. In Kaliyuga, yoga, japa, sacrifice, penance or rituals do not bear as good a fruit as listening with faith to Shri Rama's glory. Men who repeat His story to others, listen to, or chant alone this narrative of Shri Rama are absolved of sins and ascend to His abode. Shri Rama is All Beautiful, All Wise, All Merciful, Fond of the forlorn, and the Bestower of eternal bliss.

*** End of Descent VII ***

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